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The 27th Legislature
Fourth Session

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The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 27th Legislature
 Fourth Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, May 9, 2011

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Welcome back.

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

Hon. members and ladies and gentlemen, we're now going to proceed to the singing of our national anthem. I would like all to participate and feel free to sing in the language of one's choice. I'm going to call on Mr. Paul Lorieau to lead us.

Hon. Members:

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

Introduction of Visitors

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I'm thrilled and indeed honoured today to introduce to the members of this Assembly His Excellency Zhang Junsai, the ambassador of the People's Republic of China to Canada, accompanied by his wife, Yin Guomei; also, the consul general in Calgary, Madam Liu Yongfeng; Mr. Jiang Shan, minister counsellor from the embassy in Ottawa; Mr. Lei Jianzhong, from the consulate general in Calgary; and Mr. Li Kezhen and Mr. Yang Zhiqiang from the embassy. It's our great privilege to host His Excellency. We have been working harder than ever to make our relationships with China work in this year of the anniversary of Heilongjiang. Since 2003 our work with trading with China has more than doubled. With the ambassador here to speak at the Global Power Shift conference, we know that many Albertans and many guests will be honoured indeed to hear the ambassador's message.

Would His Excellency and other guests please rise and enjoy the warm welcome from this Assembly.

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

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you two outstanding Albertans. The first is someone many of us in this Assembly know very well, Dianne Nielsen, formerly Dianne Mirosh. Dianne served as a Member of the Legislative Assembly from 1986 to 1997 and held cabinet positions under both Premier Don Getty and Premier Ralph Klein. She has contributed to our province in so many ways, both as an elected official and as a volunteer. Please join me in extending the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

My second introduction is a true pillar of the Airdrie community. Brenda Moon is currently the president of the Airdrie & District Agricultural Society and has served as a volunteer with numerous organizations over the years such as the Airdrie Rodeo

Ranch Association, the Airdrie Chamber of Commerce, and of course the Airdrie Festival of Lights. She's a shining example of what makes this province great. I would ask that you join me in extending to her the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got two introductions here today. On your behalf I'd like to introduce through you to members of the Assembly 15 grades 5 and 6 students from W.R. Frose elementary school located in Fawcett. They're participating in the School at the Legislature program this week. They're accompanied by their teacher, Kim Miller, and parent helpers Terry Boyd, Kathy Fauque, Hazel Schneider, and, of course, the bus driver, Jim Laughy. They're seated in the members' gallery this afternoon. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, I'd also like to introduce to you and through you today some friends of mine, the mayor and council from Redwater, who are seated in the Speaker's gallery. These officials have been great for me to work with over the last several years. It's been a real privilege to be able to work with all my elected councils and boards, which add up to about 25 in my constituency alone. I've come to rely very heavily on their counsel and direction and have found them to be very focused and straight. At least, most of them are. In any event I'd like to ask these folks from Redwater to please stand as I call out their names: Mel Smith, the mayor; Debbie Hamilton; Jack Dennett; Les Dorosh; and Lori Lumsden, who was not able to make it here today. I'd like to invite the Assembly to please give them the traditional warm welcome.

Introduction of Guests

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

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this House some very special guests from the Echo Valley Christian school, which is located just south of Bluffton in my constituency of Lacombe-Ponoka. There are 12 students and their teacher and their parent helpers. The teacher is Mrs. Cynsee Colberg, and the helpers are Mr. David Colberg, Mr. Merv Wohlgemuth, Mrs. LeAne Wohlgemuth, Mr. Darryl Giesbrecht, and Mrs. Sue Giesbrecht. I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly the grade 6 class of Michael A. Kostek school. I had a very great chat with the students from the three classes. Today they came here with their chaperones: Meagan Rempel, Paola O'Connor, Bob Shulko, and one parent, Mr. Ron McDonald. I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome.

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

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour to introduce to you and through you today to all members of this Assembly several distinguished Alberta researchers, CEOs, and board chairs from the four Alberta Innovates corporations. These individuals are really remarkable ambassadors for our research

and innovation system here in Alberta, and I'm pleased to welcome these experts who are top researchers. They are Gary Albach, Alberta Innovates Tech Futures; Kristina Williams, Alberta Enterprise Corporation; Yaman Boluk, nanofibre chair in forest products; Steve Kuznicki, University of Alberta chemical and materials engineering. I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Liepert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce some young Albertans. Our party believes very strongly that it's important for young people to be involved and learn the intricacies of government. We think it's also important to learn those intricacies before you get elected. We have in the gallery today three summer students who are employed with my constituency office. I would ask them to stand as they're introduced: Charlotte Hall, Cooper Matheson, and from the Edmonton office Duncan Webster. They're accompanied by my constituency assistant, Laura Frank. I'd ask them all to stand and be recognized by the House.

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

1:40

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly three outstanding members from the strategic health policy group in my Ministry of Alberta Health and Wellness. This group plays an extremely important role in strengthening policy capacity within the ministry and also in developing policy for research and analysis. Here with us today are Jennifer Jabs, manager of health strategic policy; Chris Emmerling, policy analyst; and Meghan Horn, also a policy analyst. I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly, please.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development, and the hair is rather catching.

Mr. Knight: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure for me to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly four individuals that keep my office running but don't necessarily control me all of the time. Denise Kalwajtys actually was complicit in the little display I have. It is in support of prostate cancer. Both Denise and Warren Singh from my office, my executive assistant, actually have special people in their lives that are touched by this illness. I would ask my staff Warren Singh, Denise Kalwajtys, Stacey Leighton, and Chad Barber – they're all in the members' gallery – to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I have the honour of introducing one of my constituents from Drayton Valley-Calmar, Mrs. Beverly Simpson Headon. Beverly has volunteered with the Girl Guides for years, in her words, first for her children and now for herself. I would also like to point out that today is Beverly's birthday. I want to thank her for joining us here at the Legislature, and I would ask her to now please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to in-

troduce to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly a constituent from Banff-Cochrane, Mr. Rob Hatch. Mr. Hatch is the dealer of the Cochrane Canadian Tire store and chair of the Calgary Jumpstart chapter, which I will be giving a member's statement on later today. Mr. Hatch has been with Canadian Tire for 13 years, has been a resident of Banff-Cochrane for 10, and has been on the Jumpstart board of directors for six years. Sitting with Mr. Hatch in the members' gallery is Vivian Smith from Strathcona county, who is a member of the Edmonton Jumpstart chapter. I'd ask that they now stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of this House two wonderful staff members with the Wildrose caucus team. First, Lauren Armstrong is a political science student with the University of Alberta and has been with us since the start of this session, working as a legislative researcher. We also have Darren Woods, who just joined us last week. He is a student at the Bissett School of Business in Calgary and will spend the summer working with us as a communication assistant. I do not need to explain to anybody in this House how valuable our support teams are that work for us back in the office. I would ask them both to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General, later or now?

Mr. Olson: Now is good. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of people who are here representing the Boomtown Trail organization. The Boomtown Trail is basically highway 21 from New Sarepta in the north to Bassano in the south. This is a tourism region, and it's bringing the history of Alberta and rural Alberta to life. We have people here dressed as historical characters. I'm going to introduce them by their historical name and then their real name. If they'd just rise and give a wave: Sarah Brown, who is Glenys Smith from Camrose; Gabriel Dumont, who is Bob Willis from Stettler; Miss Anne Morrison, who is Sue Backs from Drumheller; Miss Alice Rogers, who is Nora Smith from Delburne; Mary Alice Tayler Presant, who is Rosalie Lammlie from Three Hills; Lily Pithouse, who is Marianne Lippiat from Hay Lakes; Mrs. Eugene Bashaw, who is Laura Graham from Bashaw; Dollie Williams, who is Twyla Chitwood from Bashaw. Portraying themselves from the Boomtown Trail organization are Ken Duncan, CEO; Verity Webster; and James Reckseidler. I'd ask that all of my colleagues in the Legislature offer them a warm welcome.

The Speaker: Hon. members, two ministers have advised that they wish to proceed with ministerial statements today, and we have Standing Order 7(1.1), which states: "At 1:50 p.m., the Assembly shall proceed to Oral Question Period with the balance of the daily routine to follow." It's not my desire to interrupt. If we recognize one to proceed with a ministerial statement, I have no doubt whatsoever that others will want to participate as well. So we're going to need a couple of motions, one that would ask for unanimous consent to proceed beyond 1:50 with this section of the Routine and a second one requesting an opportunity for other members of the Assembly to participate as well.

I will sit and I will wait to hear such a motion. First is the motion about the 1:50 time frame.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that we give unanimous consent to allow the ministerial statements to proceed beyond 1:50 and that question period be begun at the conclusion of the ministerial statements discussion.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: Okay. We can proceed with that now.
The second motion. The Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would ask the indulgence of my colleagues in the House to allow members of other caucuses to respond to the ministerial statements today.
Thank you.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: We'll proceed with that as well.

Ministerial Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Culture and Community Spirit.

National Culture Days Alberta Arts Days

Mr. Blackett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today in Vancouver was the official media launch for national Culture Days, starting the work of preparing events across Canada to celebrate arts and culture. I'm pleased to inform the House and all Albertans that the fourth annual Alberta Arts Days will occur from September 30 to October 2 in celebration of national Culture Days 2011.

Here in Alberta we are far along in our planning for three wildly creative days in cities, towns, and villages across our great province again this year. The goal of Alberta Arts Days is to ensure all Albertans have access to a wide range of cultural experiences and to encourage a greater love and appreciation for the arts while helping to foster new partnerships within our own communities. All Albertans are encouraged to participate in Alberta Arts Days. Participation can be as simple as adding an artistic element to an existing event or attending one of the hundreds of free family-oriented events throughout the province.

Last year thousands of Albertans discovered, experienced, and celebrated our unique culture, heritage, artistic diversity, and provincial pride through 681 events in 91 communities. Participation wasn't limited to our artists and cultural community. Organizations like the Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues added cultural elements to activities they were having in support of community leagues throughout the city.

Public libraries across the province participated by offering cultural programming over the weekend to their patrons. The participation of libraries is especially worthy of noting as for many new Albertans and those in a lower socioeconomic strata libraries are a key place in their community where they meet, learn, and share experiences while learning about their new home and having access to those services they otherwise wouldn't.

Schoolchildren in their schools and throughout the community were also involved through our partnership with Alberta Education. Each one of them received a flyer from their school to take home to their family, which was entitled Get Your Parents Out of the House for Three Days. And they did, Mr. Speaker. During my travels I met a family from Spruce Grove that had used the flyer and looked online at albertaartsdays.ca to see what events were taking place in Banff, where they had planned to go as a family for the weekend. This family visited the Banff Centre, toured backstage and in the costume rooms, and even enjoyed a free

lunch and musical performance as their way of celebrating our fabulous culture. That is one of the thousands of great stories of Alberta Arts Days.

In addition to these and many other locations, there were five feature celebration sites across the province which received support from the government of Alberta. This year, using the same level of funding as in 2010, the government of Alberta is committed to financially supporting a minimum of 60 designated celebration sites.

1:50

Mr. Speaker, though some parties would suggest that we don't spend enough and others would suggest that we don't spend any money at all, we think it's important as a government to celebrate families and their communities. My department has received interest from communities and organizations across the province to be part of this celebration. The applications are being reviewed now, and I will be announcing the names of the designated celebration sites by the end of May.

Hosting an Alberta Arts Days event is a wonderful opportunity to foster relationships and develop new partnerships, strengthen our community spirit, and showcase local talent. It is also a great way for organizations and communities to boost the impact and reach of the existing efforts to promote value and availability of cultural programming.

The idea of building events in communities through local support, both financial and in volunteer time, is taking hold. I would be remiss if I didn't mention the recent decision by the city of Grande Prairie to contribute \$5,000 to support Alberta Arts Days events in their community. It is this kind of support from municipalities, from private business, and from Albertans that will grow the spirit of Alberta Arts Days each and every year.

I hope all Albertans take the opportunity to discover, experience, and celebrate Alberta Arts Days 2011 in their communities between September 30 and October 2. Information about events, how people can participate, and downloadable information to help you organize your events is available on our website, albertaartsdays.ca.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: On behalf of the Official Opposition the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the opportunity to respond to the ministerial statement on the national Culture Days and on Arts Days. I know the minister should be congratulated on his work with Alberta Arts Days. I know it's a project close to his heart.

Mr. Speaker, Canadian culture has grown in vibrancy and diversity since Confederation, maturing right along with the nation. Canadian music, literature, film, dance, photography, and other art forms are gaining widespread appreciation and acceptance around the world.

Alberta artists have made key contributions to our growing world renown, and I'll be celebrating them when I celebrate Alberta Arts Days when it rolls around. But I still believe that a government with foresight would do more to invest in Alberta's arts and culture both to bolster a very important economic sector, that contributes tens of millions of dollars to our economy, and to fuel our artistic and cultural growth. Remember, every dollar invested in the arts generates triple that figure in economic activity, something this government seems to have forgotten given the wild inconsistencies in funding to Alberta's arts groups over the last few months.

Alberta is overflowing with world-leading artists, from emerging artists to established masters, and Alberta Liberals believe we help these artists achieve even greater heights with sustainable funding for the long term. An Alberta Liberal government would immediately double the budget of the Alberta Foundation for the Arts and establish a \$500 million endowment fund for the arts, social sciences, and humanities similar to existing endowment funds for medicine, engineering, and sciences.

We would also work to improve the status and legal protection of artists, most of whom remain among the most underpaid workers in our economy. Many of our artists work full-time in a variety of other sectors so they can afford to work in the arts. In effect, they're generously subsidizing our arts and cultural sector.

We would also reach out to help Alberta's publishing and film industries, which have demonstrably suffered under this government. We would establish an Alberta film and television tax credit system and a \$15 million three-year Alberta publishers' fund to reinvigorate our provincial publishing industries.

The Alberta Arts Days are a wonderful way to celebrate our grassroots and amateur artists, and I look forward to all of the events, but we must do more to support our professional artists, who play such a vital role in the province's social, economic, and cultural development. Culture breathes life into Alberta. Let's breathe a little life into our professional artists.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my distinct pleasure to rise on behalf of the Wildrose caucus to share our support for Alberta Arts Days. Arts are very important to Albertans. There are more than a million amateur artists across the province. Some paint, some make elaborate quilts, and some sing. In the latest issue of *Maclean's* they declared Alberta to be the most musical province in all of Canada. Apparently 71 per cent of us are able to play an instrument, some better than others, I'm sure, and 50 per cent say that playing music is their favourite hobby.

The Alberta Foundation for the Arts supports 40,000 events across the province, for which annual attendance exceeds 12 million people. That's more than three times the population of Alberta. One of these excellent groups or initiatives is found at the Rosebud Theatre in the constituency of Strathmore-Brooks. I think many of us here have been and have enjoyed the plays that are put on there. It's an excellent example of how the arts can reinvigorate and diversify the economy and grow economy in rural Alberta as well as provide wonderful education opportunities for our youth.

Then there are the tens of thousands of other artistic events that are entirely detached from government funding and which thrive solely based on the artists' dedication and the support of patrons. These events are just as important, and hopefully they, too, will be acknowledged and promoted by the government leading up to Alberta Arts Days this September.

While the arts are important to Albertans as an enjoyable pastime, for others a healthy arts environment is essential to their livelihood. According to the Professional Arts Coalition of Edmonton more than 3,500 Albertans work full-time in arts-related jobs, and hundreds of millions of dollars are earned and spent in Alberta's arts communities and at Alberta arts events. That's why it is important that the government support initiatives like Alberta Arts Days and, indeed, why the arts should be promoted throughout the year.

The Wildrose caucus encourages Albertans to get out and support even more arts events this summer than they did last year and, in particular, to make sure they go out with their families and en-

joy some of the events on Alberta Arts Days, which will be held across the province from September 30 until October 2.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and to join the minister in congratulating the many volunteers, artists, and community members for their commitment to Alberta Arts Days and for their subsequent contribution to the success of this event. Support for arts and culture in our province is vital to developing vibrant and diverse communities.

There is no doubt that arts and culture enrich our daily lives and help give meaning to our experiences. That is why Alberta's NDP opposition advocates for support for the fine arts and cultural activities year-round rather than simply on a few limited showcase days. While showcases have their place in arts and culture programming, they are meaningless without sustainable and predictable support to artists and cultural groups throughout the year, support that this government has consistently cut. Over the last three years this minister has overseen over 50 per cent cuts to his ministry's budget.

Rather than taking the advice of the arts community in terms of the needed programming and funding for sustainable arts and the cultural production sector, this government is content to declare a three-day public relations showcase to raise awareness of the work of the artisans who struggle throughout the year due to a lack of government support. The superficial nature of the PC government's commitment to the arts is demonstrated by the fact that the minister has just announced an increase in designated celebration sites, from five to 60, but has not announced a corresponding increase in project funding.

The minister's call for students to get their parents out of the house for three days is particularly frustrating in light of this government's ongoing disregard for the role of fine arts within the education system. The image of the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit lauding a three-day event as promoting arts appreciation to schoolchildren while at the same time the Department of Education consistently underfunds the fine arts, considering it an expendable luxury rather than a crucial pillar of a full education, is disappointing.

Alberta's NDP opposition believes fine arts and culture should be fully integrated in the school curriculum from kindergarten through grade 12, provided by skilled and qualified teachers, complemented by other artists and experiences to encounter professional fine arts supported with the necessary resources. Our vision of the fine arts in education sees every student having opportunity to not only develop skills but also to grow an appreciation and pleasure for the significance of fine arts in the living of a full and complete life.

Alberta's NDP opposition is proud of the wonderful tradition of arts and culture in Alberta and will work to ensure it remains accessible to all Albertans via their education throughout their lives and through increasing sustained, predictable funding for professional artists. Unfortunately, for the moment Alberta's vibrant arts and cultural sectors survives in spite of the PC government, not because of it.

The Speaker: Hon. Minister of Energy, please proceed with the second ministerial statement.

Oil and Gas Regulatory System

Mr. Liepert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise in the House today to announce significant progress in creating a more

competitive regulatory system for Alberta's energy resources through the establishment of a single regulator. The means to accomplish this are contained in a draft discussion document entitled *Enhancing Assurance: Developing an Integrated Energy Resource Regulator*, which will be tabled in this Assembly later today by my colleague the Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar. This document is the culmination of a process that included extensive engagement with the energy industry, aboriginals, and a broad range of stakeholders.

2:00

Mr. Speaker, energy is Alberta. It provides a standard of living for this province that is among the best in the world. Some two years ago the government embarked on a very rigorous undertaking to determine our competitiveness with other similar jurisdictions. That report, entitled *Energizing Investment*, was made public on March 11, 2010, and the report had two major recommendations. Alberta needed to change its fiscal regime and reduce its regulatory complexity in order to regain its competitive advantage.

Government followed through with the fiscal changes in March of last year, and after further consultation with industry, additional changes were announced at the end of May 2010. We also announced that those would be the final adjustments to the fiscal regime because investors needed predictability and stability. Now, one year later, this stable fiscal policy has resulted in \$2.6 billion in revenue from land sales, the highest fiscal year on record, Mr. Speaker, and a 42 per cent increase in well completions from 2009-10. Our changes have worked and will continue to work.

Getting the fiscal structure right, however, was only half of the answer. The other initiative was streamlining our regulatory structure, and an MLA committee comprised of the members for Drayton Valley-Calmar, Red Deer-South, and Livingston-Macleod conducted an extensive review and engagement with stakeholders during much of 2010. Their recommendations in *Enhancing Assurance: Report and Recommendations of the Regulatory Enhancement Task Force*, were released on January 28 of this year. Government promised to follow through with action, and that is what is proposed today.

This draft discussion document calls for the use of best practices in the operation, functions, and processes of a proposed single regulator. The regulatory system needs to support the development of Alberta's energy resources while ensuring that vital environmental resources – air, water, land, and biodiversity – are managed appropriately. Regulatory enhancement is not about reducing environmental standards, nor will it diminish the ability of the system to respond to the needs of those affected by development such as landowners.

The document will be tabled in the House later today by my colleague from Drayton Valley-Calmar and is designed to elicit feedback in the coming months and form the basis of legislation at the next sitting of the Legislature.

The Speaker: On behalf of the Official Opposition the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, the first thing we need to remember is that this government caused the regulatory royalty problems. Can they really be the ones to fix it? We'll see.

Way back in 2009 Alberta Liberal MLAs engaged in a vigorous year-long consultation process with key players in the energy sector. The overwhelming message we received from the people working in oil and gas was that above all else the industry wants certainty and stability. That's why regulatory reform is front and

centre in the oil and gas policy we released way back in January 2010.

Once upon a time Alberta had the best regulatory framework of any oil-producing jurisdiction, allowing the industry to succeed, but what was once an efficient and effective regulatory system has become cumbersome. It used to take a year to get regulatory approval. It now takes three.

Alberta Liberals recognize that this approach does not work, so our policy calls for a simplified regulatory system with a one-window approach to approvals, permits, inspections, and so on. We would also improve co-ordination in oil and gas matters between the ERCB, Alberta Environment, Alberta Energy, and Sustainable Resource Development, and with the federal government and our First Nations. It sounds as though the Energy minister is taking some small steps forward by stealing some great ideas from our playbook, especially our one-window approach and our belief that industry must be consulted regularly.

Though I'm looking forward to carefully re-examining the minister's draft discussion document, to be sure, you can bet we will be watching to see if the government follows through. The one-regulator approach is all well and good, but we'll also be watching to make sure that there is no reduction in environmental remediation or financial security standards, and rest assured that we'll be pushing the government to give the public enhanced opportunities for public participation in the regulatory process.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Wildrose caucus is pleased to see that this government has finally moved toward streamlining the regulatory framework for Alberta's energy sector; however, there is no way that it should have taken this long to take the first step toward simplifying the process. Nevertheless, we along with the energy sector are eager to read and consider the draft discussion document from the Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar. The details will be very important, and we hope that this document will live up to its billing. We have heard that there has been consultation with many different groups and that this discussion will facilitate further input in the discussion going forward. It is our desire that the end results will in fact incorporate what the government has heard from landowners, oil and gas companies, aboriginal groups, environmental groups, and other stakeholders to the benefit of all.

In terms of the government's heralded fiscal policy we take exception to the idea that this government is the driving force in regaining Alberta's competitive advantage, especially when they themselves are directly responsible for messing things up in the first place by tearing up mineral lease contracts and by creating chaos and instability for over three years. It was the innovation of Albertans and the tenacity of our oil and gas industry along with the recovery of the global economy which has driven our prosperity as a province, not the faulty fiscal policy tinkering of this government. This government ran over the industry and its workers with a dump truck and with runaway spending and is now claiming victory for hauling them to the emergency room after much money and work.

However, we acknowledge that regulatory reform is both necessary and long overdue, and we will thoroughly examine the government's conclusions and proposals in this area. We believe that there is still much more work to be done, and the Wildrose caucus believes much more can be done without compromising the regulatory requirements or placing undue burden on our most prosperous industry or our environment.

Predictability, stability, rule of law, or final adjustments: this is a farce, Mr. Speaker. The government has been nothing less than an economic wrecking ball for the last three years.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The prosperity and stability of this province depends on Alberta developing our important oil and gas resources in a safe and smart way to ensure our markets are strong and to ensure a good quality of life for all Albertans. The message the minister is delivering is not that Alberta is seeking to become more competitive but that this government is seeking to make it easier for the oil industry to do what they wish and to rake in maximum profits as fast as they can.

We have ample evidence, even as recently as the past few days in regard to a massive pipeline spill in northern Alberta, that the current regulators are not doing a satisfactory job of regulating, monitoring, or communicating about the issues. Now the proposal is to reduce even what is now in place. Replacing three rubber stamps with a single rubber stamp does not improve environmental protection or protect the public interest.

Alberta's NDP is committed to ensure that we have regulations that are meaningful, that the compliance with those regulations is well monitored, and that violations are vigorously prosecuted. Unless we do this, jobs and economic strength for tomorrow are put at risk. Unfortunately, we cannot expect this from a PC government that is largely financed by the very industry it purports to regulate. Mr. Speaker, this is the tail wagging the dog. It is just more of the same.

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

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I look forward to this afternoon's tabling by the Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar. As I recall, the announcement of this extensive review of our energy industry's regulatory framework was made at the same time that the hon. minister finally put the royalty framework for oil and gas back together. The minister is correct. Certainly, on the fiscal side certainty has returned and along with it Alberta's competitiveness in oil and gas relative to Saskatchewan, B.C., and other jurisdictions.

Mr. Speaker, it is very clear – and it was very clear as I did my own consultations with top people in the oil and gas industry in the months leading up to this government seeing, if never exactly apologizing to those who lost their jobs or their businesses over it, the error of its ways on royalties – that another big drag on our competitiveness with other jurisdictions was Alberta's regulatory regime. It was and is in need of some simplifying, of becoming more of a one-window approach, where a company that wishes to develop the resource could jump through all the necessary hoops at relatively the same time, not have the process dragged out for years and years.

But the standards that we set must not be compromised. The minister has just told us that they will not be, and the discussion document that the Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar will table soon will show us whether the minister is correct or not.

2:10

Mr. Speaker, the Premier has vowed to hold Plains Midstream Canada's feet to the fire over last week's Rainbow pipeline spill. We need only think back about a year to BP's blowout in the Gulf of Mexico or a couple of decades to the grounding of the *Exxon Valdez* in Alaska to be graphically and painfully reminded of the devastation that oil can cause when there is not appropriate regula-

tory oversight in place both at the front end in setting the environmental health and safety standards and at the back end in making sure that those standards are in fact enforced.

The energy industry is a positive force in the province of Alberta. We cannot get to where we dream of being or to what we dream of Alberta becoming without a healthy, competitive oil and gas industry. Our regulatory standards and processes in the past were the envy of the world, and in streamlining them, we need to make sure that they are once again in the future.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we'll conclude the question period if we continue after 3 o'clock. I will not rise as per Standing Order 7(7) until we conclude the question period, so we'll have the full 50 minutes.

Secondly, should there be a question addressed to the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security, as the result of an unfortunate accident that he got himself involved in last week doing things that younger men should do and snapping an ankle or something, he will be able to stay in the comfort of his chair rather than being required to rise to respond should a question come. So that's the soft side today.

Oral Question Period

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

Patient Advocacy by Health Professionals

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Over 30,000 health professionals have made it clear that only a public inquiry can get to the bottom of this government's culture of fear and intimidation. This Premier and his minister of health have no interest, however, in finding the truth. Well, Mr. Premier, we're not going to stop until the truth about your government's mismanagement of public health care and its disgusting tactics of fear and intimidation are fully exposed. Albertans have no reason to trust you. Will the Premier finally come clean and tell Albertans why you'd rather cover up the truth and keep the skeletons in the closet than call a public inquiry?

Speaker's Ruling Parliamentary Language

The Speaker: Pretty strong language in there about accusing a member and saying: covering up the truth. I'm not sure that's exactly what the Leader of the Official Opposition wanted to say, but he did say it.

Hon. Premier, if you wish to proceed.

Patient Advocacy by Health Professionals (continued)

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, there have been a number of times when the opposition have used language that's unparliamentary. You know, notwithstanding the behaviour of the opposition, there have been a number of times I've risen in the House and said that there is a very robust review being done by the Health Quality Council. I understand that today there were a small number of doctors that took part in a news conference and spoke to the media about their experiences in the health care system. I am sure that if these doctors that were at the conference today want to say the same things, express their opinions to the Health Quality Council

in terms of how they can improve the system, they're there to listen. [interjection]

Dr. Swann: Well, is the Premier saying that 30,000 health care professionals, including doctors, are wrong in calling for a public inquiry and that the doctor Premier from Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville has the prescription for Alberta's ailing health care system?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I just heard that there was a comment made that the doctors wouldn't be protected. They took part in a news conference. They spoke publicly. So why is it they can't take those same opinions and express them to the Health Quality Council?

Dr. Swann: Will the Premier finally find his backbone and tell Albertans why he insists on covering up the truth instead of calling a public inquiry?

Speaker's Ruling Parliamentary Language

The Speaker: Okay. That's the second time for the unparliamentary phrase: covering up the truth. That's a direct accusation against a member. It's unparliamentary. We're going to move on to your next question.

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

Health Services Local Decision-making

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, despite firm opposition from experts and stakeholders in 2008, the government went ahead and forged a superboard to manage and deliver all of Alberta's health care system, a failed experiment costing Albertans over \$1.2 billion. Now, after wasting precious health care funding on a transition nobody wanted, Alberta Health Services is shifting back to increased local decision-making. Since the Premier has flip-flopped on government policy again, will he admit that this government's centralization of health care has been an epic failure?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, once again a total misunderstanding of what Dr. Eagle announced. There were always five management regions in the province. What happened is that the doctor, through listening to not only what MLAs and ministers brought through suggestions in terms of better decision-making at the local level, has reorganized. Now there'll be more decision-making at the local level which will deal with very simple situations like when to put a light bulb in a surgical suite, all of those things that will now be taken care of through a common-sense approach.

Dr. Swann: Common sense, Mr. Speaker: what an innovation.

Given that in response to the opposition the Premier has said in this House, "I know they're still upset over the changes to the one superboard; we're not backing off," will the Premier admit that the needless instability created and \$1.2 billion in overspending was a huge step backwards for the health care system?

Mr. Stelmach: Actually, it was a very positive step forward. It has minimized the number of people in management in terms of dealing with management issues, put more money into where money was necessary, and that was to front-line health care services. We see waiting lists improving throughout the province. We see more surgeries being done. That is a direct testament to the changes that were made.

Dr. Swann: Will the Premier apologize to the many health care workers who have been threatened and demoralized when they challenged this colossal failure of planning resulting from the creation of the superboard? Will you apologize, Mr. Premier?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, once again, \$600 million going to one health board in the province is \$600 million worth of savings that have gone directly to front-line services. That's \$600 million that previously went to management and board expenses, et cetera, that is now going directly to nurses and doctors that are practising medicine in this province.

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

Plains Midstream Canada Pipeline Leak

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last Thursday computers for a pipeline company detected a problem on a 40-year-old line at 7 p.m. While it triggered an initial shutdown, this was overridden, and the line was restarted several times. At 7:50 a.m. the next day the company confirmed that there had been a release of what would later be reported at 4.5 million litres of crude. This will affect the local ecosystem for decades. To the Minister of Energy: does the government share the concern of Albertans that it took the company 12 hours to confirm the leak and even then got the facts wrong?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think the appropriate thing to do – and I would ask the indulgence of the member. The Energy Resources Conservation Board was on-site shortly after being notified of the leak on Friday. Part of the role of the ERCB is to do an extensive review of what transpired. That is about to be completed and will be released shortly. Until that review has been completed, I don't think we should be jumping to conclusions.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Again to the same minister: why is there no requirement for the company to physically check the line prior to several attempts to restart after systems have repeatedly triggered a shutdown?

Mr. Liepert: As I said, Mr. Speaker, these are the kinds of accusations that the Energy Resources Conservation Board will be looking at through the course of their review. We want to make sure that we're dealing with fact and not possibly what may have been gleaned out of a newspaper article. When that report is completed, we'll release it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Again to the same minister: why did it take until late in the day on May 3 for the ERCB to publicly release the actual scale of the spill when the spill took place on April 29?

Mr. Liepert: Well, I think the member would probably understand that this particular spill was in a very remote area of the province. The ERCB does not engage in hypothetical situations, as some others might. They wanted to be assured that the information that they were making public was, in fact, correct. I'd just as soon, Mr. Speaker, have the correct information than have them rush out the door with incorrect information.

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

Long-term Care

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We hear from the government how important seniors are and how they get the care they need in the right place at the right time. This year's throne speech told Albertans that seniors would be given more choice and greater independence, yet hundreds wait in hospitals, assisted living, and at home for long-term care. My questions are to the Premier. Seeing as Alberta health policy forces seniors in assisted living to take the first available long-term care bed no matter where it is, how can you claim to be keeping seniors near their home?

2:20

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we're well ahead of the schedule that we had articulated to Albertans in terms of construction. We thought we'd have about 800 continuing care beds built in the province, and now we're in excess of 1,100. We'll probably reach 1,300. We do have to build about a thousand additional continuing care beds a year to keep up with the aging population in the province.

Mrs. Forsyth: You didn't answer the question, Premier.

Given that the Premier continues to say that seniors now have more choice and greater independence, can he tell us how many seniors in assisted living end up in a hospital bed first before getting the long-term care that they need?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, there are seniors that are still in . . . [interjection] The reason the member didn't hear the answer to the first question is that she's listening to her partner sitting next to her.

Mrs. Forsyth: My last question is to the Premier again. How can you say that seniors are getting the best care in the best settings when a senior asks for help to take their loved one to the washroom, and they're told to let them go in their diaper?

Mr. Stelmach: That's absolute, ridiculous nonsense. We have very, very good, quality care in the province of Alberta for seniors, and to bring stuff like that to the floor is absolutely wrong. There are many dedicated health care workers in the province that are doing their best to look after our seniors, who are very deserving of good, quality care. We'll continue to improve in Alberta what are some of the best programs in the country of Canada, and we're also going to be able to do that at very, very affordable prices, you know, the costs that seniors pay. This is a huge problem for us right across the country of Canada with an aging population.

Critical Transmission Infrastructure

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, documents leaked to the NDP show that as early as October 2010 the Tory caucus was informed that this government's proposed \$13 billion transmission infrastructure program was unaffordable and based on inaccurate and unreasonable power demand projections. Can the Energy minister tell the Assembly why this government believes that power consumption will rise by 27,000 gigawatt hours in the next eight years when it only rose 5,000 in the last 10?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, when deregulation took place in this province, about 10 to 15 years ago, what was created was something called the Alberta Electric System Operator, commonly known as AESO. AESO has two responsibilities. One is to ensure that we have an effective and efficiently run system. I think every member would agree that the power system in this province is run very effectively and very efficiently. Their second role is to do long-range planning. It's from part of that long-range planning

that some of these projections have come out. AESO will be releasing a new long-range plan in the near future, and hopefully it'll be similar.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Given that a homeowner who uses a thousand kilowatt hours per month will pay between \$256 and \$413 more per year because of this unnecessary infrastructure plan, how can the Energy minister be so out of touch with Alberta families that he does not understand the burden that this will place on household budgets, especially for those on fixed incomes?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, talk about spreading fear and intimidation. That is absolutely false. The projections from the independent operator are that the actual cost as a result of the four critical transmission lines will be the equivalent of \$1 per month per residential customer for every billion dollars billed.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, you need an interpreter to understand that answer.

Given that this government has already spiked increases in pensions for seniors and given that this transmission white elephant will jack up power bills for seniors by hundreds of dollars, why won't this minister admit that the government would rather see seniors out on the street than stand up to the big power companies and their puppet, AESO?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I think what the member is attempting to do is reopen the debate under Bill 50, and we can go back and have that debate if we like. We want to ensure that we have critical transmission so that in the year 2020 all of those who are living south of Red Deer do not have to worry about the access to power, and we want to ensure that industry remains competitive in this province. [interjection]

The Speaker: Are we dancing? What are we doing?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House.

Plains Midstream Canada Pipeline Leak (continued)

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. In 2005 a massive oil spill at Wabamun Lake exposed this government's pathetic lack of emergency response plans. At the time the government's response was: we can do better. Well, you didn't, and unfortunately it appears that the government's focus again is on controlling the messaging rather than dealing with the problem. As we saw in 2005, the initial reaction from government and industry is: this can't be a problem; keep going. So the flow of oil rather than the double check is not a problem for the environment. To the Minister of Environment: what has actually changed?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, a significant amount of change has taken place. Lessons were learned since the Wabamun incident. In this particular case there was a response like none other to first of all control the release, to stop the flow of oil within the pipeline, and then to maintain as small an affected area as possible. Beyond that, there is a 24-hour, round-the-clock effort now under way to ensure that it's cleaned up as best as it possibly can be.

Ms Blakeman: You must be blessing those beavers.

Back to the same minister: given that I've raised the issue of how and what the government tests for in air monitoring repeatedly and given that the First Nations are again raising health concerns resulting from oil industry activity, how can the minister say that without a doubt there are no negative impacts?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, the statements that I make are based upon Health Canada's air quality standards. Those standards apply across the entire country. I can definitively say that the air quality is well below health quality standards. I cannot in all good conscience say that there cannot and will not be an impact on health to any individual. I can say that they are well below accepted Health Canada standards.

Ms Blakeman: Back to the same minister: how much of this cleanup and the cost of long-term effects like the destruction of wetlands will be shouldered by the taxpayer?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, nothing. Nothing will be borne by the taxpayers other than, of course, the role that the regulators are playing. We have staff that are on the ground, ERCB has staff on the ground, Alberta Health has staff on the ground, and those costs are minimal. Those are employees of the department. All costs associated with the cleanup and remediation are the responsibility of the company.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

WCB Cancer Coverage for Firefighters

Mr. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first question today is to the Minister of Employment and Immigration, responsible for the WCB. In Alberta we have approximately 3,500 full-time firefighters, that do just a great job for us. A number of years ago we passed legislation that allowed them to collect WCB if, in fact, they had certain types of cancer. I see that there are some more cancers added to the list. To the minister: I'd like to know what kind of scientific . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister, please.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, there were a number of cancers that had a presumptive clause in the WCB act through regulations deeming them work-related cancers when firefighters developed one of those cancers. Recently I added four more. There is scientific evidence obtained by firefighters and their association that shows that there is a causal relationship between the chemicals that they're exposed to and the development of cancer. They develop cancer at a much more prevalent rate than the general population does.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Given that there are approximately 10,000 volunteer firefighters, that are exposed to the same kind of carcinogens, I was wondering if the municipalities have given any indication of this concern that they might have.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

2:30

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. About 80 per cent of Alberta's firefighters are volunteers, and they do important work in many of Alberta's communities, and we need to support them.

This issue is important to all our firefighters, whether they're career or volunteer, and to the municipalities that they serve. Volunteer firefighters have talked to me on numerous occasions about this important issue, and that's why our fire commissioner's office has been working with all fire departments as well as Employment and Immigration and other partners in the discussion concerning presumptive cancers.

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, back to the first minister. It would seem to me that it would only make sense, since these 10,000 are exposed to the same carcinogens, that they, too, would be covered under the WCB. So to the minister: are you considering doing this? If not, why not?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Member for Rocky Mountain House has been very supportive of an initiative of expanding this protection to volunteer firefighters, and I thank him for his ongoing support. I am definitely considering it, and at this point in time I can tell the Member for Rocky Mountain House to stay tuned.

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

Protection of Children in Care

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Fourteen-month-old Elizabeth Velasquez had already suffered two broken legs when her desperate grandparents contacted police and Alberta Children and Youth Services in March of last year. Some six weeks later paramedics rushed the toddler to Alberta Children's hospital but were unable to revive her. The cause of death, we now know, was nonaccidental asphyxiation. To the Minister of Children and Youth Services. Given that the police child abuse unit recommended that it do so, why did the department not take Elizabeth into protective custody before it was too late?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, Mr. Speaker, this is a very tragic situation, as the member has said to you. I did learn on Wednesday as well that the Calgary Police Service are investigating a toddler's death, that was determined to be an accident a year ago, as a homicide. Given that the Calgary Police Service are investigating, you can understand that I cannot share all information about this case, but I can confirm to you, hon. member – you asked about the staff – that we were actively involved, the child and family services authority in Calgary, from March 15 to May 2, 2010. Given the seriousness of this new information, that I learned on Wednesday, I have put forward a number of initiatives to address the situation.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Again to the minister: why only now, when Elizabeth's grandparents have gone public, has the department decided to launch an internal review into the mishandling of the case?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, as I indicated to you, I did learn about this on Wednesday. I have discussed it with the police service, the deputy chief responsible for the area, the chief of police, and others in the field. I have a number of initiatives, as I indicated to you. One is an external review of expert people on a panel, who will take the information from Health Services, Calgary Police Service, and our child and family services authority over that six-week period. They will take note of the police advice that is on the file, and they

will make solid recommendations as to how we can learn from the tragedy. Once that review is completed, I can assure you, Mr. Speaker, it will be submitted to me, and it will become part of an overarching internal investigation.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. My final question again to the minister: in the interests of transparency will the minister undertake to make this review public?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can tell you also, though, that one of the initiatives is that I've directed each of our 10 regional authorities to complete a detailed review as well of all the detailed information that's on active files for our children under the age of six who have experienced abuse or neglect.

Your question, that third question, about transparency is very important, and I want you to know that although I'll be respecting the confidentiality of the child and the family and that this is an ongoing police investigation, lessons to be learned from this will be made public.

Plains Midstream Canada Pipeline Leak (continued)

Ms Calahasen: In the early hours of April 29, 2011, a portion of the 700-kilometre pipeline that runs through my constituency ruptured and resulted in the release of approximately 28,000 barrels of crude oil. Oil spilled onto traditional lands impacted wildlife and caused justifiable concern to the MD, the two First Nations, and the Métis communities in the area. My question is to the Minister of Environment. During our site visit on Saturday – and thank you for that – we observed significant activity to recover the product and clean up the spill. First Nations elders, however, expressed concerns regarding long-term effects and wanted to ensure that the cleanup is done. How will you commit to ensuring that this is done right . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister, please.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member is absolutely correct. The elders that accompanied us on a tour of the site on Saturday expressed good support for the work that is under way but were concerned, however, that the long-term impact would not be addressed adequately. I gave my assurance at that time that we will rigorously pursue this company to ensure not only that the immediate cleanup is successfully done but that remediation takes place in an appropriate way, and we will ensure that that happens.

Ms Calahasen: To the same minister: given, by your own admission, that initial communication with First Nations, Métis, and the MD could have been better, what will be done now to ensure that leaders and elders in my communities are provided with the information they require?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, the visit that we made on Saturday was truly a first step in what I believe to be a long process in establishing lines of communication between the government, industry, the two First Nations, as well as the elders and community members within that region. We recognize that in the short term, at the initial stages, communications could have been and should have been better. That doesn't mean that they need to be that way the rest of the time, so I also gave my assurance that I would return to the region this fall to ensure that they are comfortable with the work that has taken place.

Ms Calahasen: My final question is to the Minister of Energy. Given that the Energy Resources Conservation Board will ultimately decide when the pipeline is reopened, what will you do to ensure that this is done as responsibly and collaboratively as possible with the people of the area?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, as I said earlier, the Energy Resources Conservation Board has been on-site since Friday and was part of ensuring that the pipeline was repaired very quickly. It's been about 10 days now, and there are some other consequences here that need to be put on the record. The town of Norman Wells in the Northwest Territories, as an example, has declared a state of emergency because its natural gas supply has been cut off due to this line not being up and running. So the ERCB has to take those considerations into account along with ensuring that the safety and the regulatory requirements will be met. I anticipate that to be fairly quickly.

New School Construction

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, as a result of this government's misguided cuts to education, the cuts will lead to fewer teachers in classrooms and through-the-roof increases in busing fees. The reason for this increase is this government's complete inability to build neighbourhood schools. Instead of doing this, the government's solution is to bus children, sometimes more than a one-hour ride, to the school they are going to. To the Minister of Infrastructure: when will this government start building schools when communities are built, not a quarter of a century later?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member opposite does know that we are building schools. In fact, in ASAP 1 we built 18 schools: nine schools in Calgary and nine schools in Edmonton. Last year we initiated to build 14 more schools. That was 10 schools under ASAP 2 and also four high schools.

Mr. Hehr: Well, given that many Calgary families will be forced to pay an additional \$670 in busing fees to get their kids to school because they do not have a neighbourhood school, when will the minister take ownership of the problem and commit to building schools in neighbourhoods where these children live?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, we're doing that. Last week, in fact, I was in Calgary, and we opened I believe it was four schools in Calgary, ensuring that individual students had an opportunity to get their education right in their communities.

Mr. Hehr: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that there are another 10 schools in Calgary and given that there are another 10 schools in Edmonton and other places in this province that need schools, that answer isn't good enough. Will the minister commit in the short term to covering the cost of this additional busing until these neighbourhood schools are built?

2:40

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, in fact, we are building schools. This government is very, very responsible in trying to build schools in areas where they are necessary. This government is also looking at where the necessity of schools will be in the future. We work with the co-operation of school boards and with the co-operation of communities to make sure that this does happen.

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

Research and Innovation Funding

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Economic diversification is a hot topic these days, and no matter where you stand on this issue, you can't help but recognize the important role that research and innovation will play in our future. The Alberta Innovates system is a big step in this direction, but many researchers have questions about how the system will fund or support their work, especially if it doesn't neatly fall within one of the system's priority areas. All my questions are for the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. As Alberta Innovates continues to focus our research investments, researchers like those in attendance today, Mr. Minister, want to know if basic, curiosity-driven research is being left by the wayside.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Weadick: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to have this question today. Curiosity-based or basic research continues to play a very, very important role in research in this province. Much of it is conducted on the campuses of our colleges and technical institutes and universities. It's funded through those institutions. It's a very important part of it, but we also have an important role to play in directed or specific research that impacts the entire province, things like the nanotechnology area, where we've set a policy in place that helps us to direct research into nanotechnology. Assistance for those things in Alberta that will benefit the taxpayers in the province is also critically important.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If the government is setting the overall direction for these arm's-length Alberta Innovates corporations, the researchers would like to know: how is the minister going to ensure their objective approach to research and innovation?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Weadick: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, the province does set some general guidelines or areas of research that we believe would benefit our province. Some of those would include agriculture and forestry and bio or energy and the environment or health, which are all critically important to Albertans. We do help set the direction, but these boards of businesspeople, of researchers do work at arm's length to government and help set the direction of research, where it's going and which projects will be funded.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Finally, can the minister please respond to concerns that this approach will see the government invest only in research that's commercially viable and that will potentially make money?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Weadick: Well, thank you. We do hear a lot about commercialization, and we do hope that research that's occurring in Alberta does turn into viable opportunities, turns into an investment of capital, and turns into real employment here in Alberta. But that's not all that it's about. It's about finding solutions to

making healthier Albertans. It's about finding solutions to delivering health care more effectively and efficiently. These are important. We often say that it's not just selling products; it's from the lab to the bedside, making people's stay in hospital safer.

Plains Midstream Canada Pipeline Leak (continued)

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, on April 29 the Plains Midstream pipeline began leaking, and the ERCB advised only that a leak of undetermined volume had been detected. The next day government was told that the spill was the worst in 35 years, yet they kept silent for four more days. All the while, the community members were kept in the dark. Will the Minister of Energy explain why the ERCB breached its duty to the public and, particularly, to the Lubicon people by waiting until the day after the federal election to alert the public to the true severity of the spill?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, the spill was in a remote part of the province. It was important that the information be correct rather than quick. The Minister of Environment did mention that there were discussions with the First Nations on the weekend, that he did apologize for the breakdown in communications, and we acknowledge that they could have been... [interjection] The member seems to have the answer, so I'll let her answer.

Ms Notley: Given that the ERCB was advised last Saturday, two Saturdays ago, that this spill was the largest in 35 years and then waited until after the election to tell anybody, will the minister responsible for the ERCB advise this House what exactly he knew about the spill and when he knew it?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, to draw a comparison to the federal election is absurd. It just shows that this particular member is completely out of touch when a situation like this happens.

One of the things that you have to ensure takes place is that we work with the company to get the issue resolved as quickly as possible. That was done. As I said earlier, there probably was some additional communication within the communities that could have taken place, but you can't fix history, and we have assured that we will in the future.

Ms Notley: Well, given that having the ERCB review the appropriateness of a response by the ERCB is actually more ridiculous than having industry police its own safety standards, will the minister commit to releasing all documents relating to the cause and the extent of the spill, its cleanup, health and environmental damage, and all communications so that Albertans can judge for themselves the appropriateness of this response?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, nobody said that the ERCB was going to review the ERCB. What I said earlier was that the ERCB was conducting a full inquiry into this particular incident, as it would under any incident like this. The information, the review, will be public, and the member will have every opportunity to look at it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Workers' Compensation for Injured Transit Driver

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. Tom Bregg continues to heal from

the brutal assault which occurred on December 3, 2009, while operating a city bus for Edmonton Transit System. He has permanently lost the use of his left eye and still requires further facial surgeries. The WCB has been threatening to cease wage replacement for noncompliance. My first question is to the minister in charge of the WCB. Why is this man, an innocent victim of a vicious, violent crime, having his benefits threatened by the Workers' Compensation Board at this time?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, first of all, what has happened to this gentleman was despicable, and from occupational health and safety purposes I hope something like this never happens again.

Now, with respect to his recovery he, thankfully, is recovering and under the good care of medical doctors here in the province. The Workers' Compensation Board reviews medical reports that are submitted by his treating physicians, and ultimately there will be a joint decision made on whether he is capable of returning to some form of employment. Ultimately, I imagine he also would like to return to some form of employment. But I cannot comment on the decision because no decisions have been made at this point.

Mr. MacDonald: Mr. Speaker, again to the same minister: given that in a message to stakeholders the minister said, "I am pleased to work with the Workers' Compensation Board to ensure this province's workers and employers have a strong and stable source of support when workplace injury strikes," how is the WCB's threat to cease wage replacement for Mr. Bregg a strong and stable source of support when workplace injury strikes?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, the WCB does not threaten. They make decisions. Either they make a decision to remove benefits or to not. Then there is in place a due process for appeals if a worker is not satisfied with the decision. Having said that, no such decision has been made. I firmly believe that a decision will be made based on medical evidence in the best interests of the worker, making sure that when he is able to return to some form of modified employment, that opportunity will be extended to him.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. Again to the same minister. I have spoken to Mr. Bregg and his family and have permission to discuss this matter.

The Speaker: But you don't have opportunities for preambles in your question.

Mr. MacDonald: Why are the city of Edmonton's director of labour relations and the Workers' Compensation Board spokesperson discussing the case of this innocent man, who was the victim of a violent crime, in public?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, this is quite ironic because, unlike this member, I will not discuss this case in public. Hence, I will not be making any comments to that specific case. If the worker chooses to divulge the details of his case, he's always more than welcome to do that. Workers' Compensation has not been discussing this case in public either.

I have to tell you, Mr. Speaker, that if there are any issues on the file, there is a course of appeal that a worker can undertake, and the decisions are made based on the medical evidence. I will make sure that the right decisions are made because the process is such that it leads to proper decisions.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Adverse Possession of Land

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Rural constituents have recently contacted me with concerns about the common law doctrine of adverse possession, or squatters' rights. Apparently, they are having disputes with neighbours who are claiming part of their quarter section because of a misplaced fence that is robbing them of as much as five acres of their land. To the hon. Attorney General and Minister of Justice: why does this archaic practice of land grabbing still apply in our modern society?

2:50

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

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While I acknowledge the hon. member's significant knowledge in the area of surveying and I also spent 30 years practising real estate law, I'm well aware that there are often boundary disputes. We do have a system that is based on the Torrens system of land registration, British common law, and we have the Limitations Act, adverse possession law, and so on. Some of it goes back to 1870. It is also true that there is a way that people can get title by having occupied land for long enough, but I'm not aware of any great problem there.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Allred: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Really, this is more than just boundary disputes. Given that adverse possession is a common law remedy from the Northwest Territories inherited from England in 1870 and given that the land title and property boundary demarcation system is vastly different in Alberta than in England, does the minister think this law should be applicable in Alberta?

Mr. Olson: Mr. Speaker, this practice, this system, has been in place, as I mentioned, for many years. I think the hon. member himself would acknowledge that there have been very few of these cases over a hundred years, less than one a year. I'm not convinced that there is a burning need for a legislative change here.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Allred: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question again to the same minister: given that our Torrens system of land titles guarantees title to land, does the doctrine of adverse possession not undermine our guaranteed title system?

The Speaker: Well, you're asking for a legal interpretation here, which is not the purpose of question period, but if you want to, proceed shortly and briefly.

Mr. Olson: Mr. Speaker, maybe I'll just suggest to the hon. member that he spend some time with me. We can talk this over, and I'll have the information for him.

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

Health Services Local Decision-making

(continued)

Mr. Hinman: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has a knack for creating problems and then taking far too long to fix them. The best example of this was the new royalty framework. After running the dump truck over our energy sector, it took this government three years and too many tries to finally get it back to where we were. They are still at it. After paralyzing our health

care system in 2008, they finally decided to begin a long process of decentralizing the health superboard. To the health minister. Five zones and you still don't have a plan to properly empower local health care providers. Why don't you just admit that you don't know what to do and you're slapping on another Band-Aid?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, that's the kind of misinformation that needs to stop by that member and by other friends of his in that caucus. When the Alberta Health Services was created, it had already established right soon thereafter five zones. Just like the press release says, geographically those five zones don't change. What is changing is more capacity for local decision-making because the circumstances today are vastly different than they were two, three years ago.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hinman: No, it's a placebo.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the now Energy minister brought in the superboard three years ago and he said it would "ensure a more streamlined system for patients," are we to conclude based on last week's announcement that the government has finally concluded that the superboard has failed in this regard and now doesn't know what to do?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I think this demonstrates extremely well that the Alberta Health Services Board knows exactly what to do. Now that they don't have to worry about \$1.3 billion worth of deficit, now that they have stable five-year funding guarantees, now that they have the five-year health action plan and all the other accountability measures, it's possible to move on with the next phase of this local decision-making. That's what we've got, and it's looking really good so far.

Mr. Hinman: Three years of confusion is going to turn into five years of confusion.

Mr. Speaker, the proposed changes to the superboard structure don't go nearly far enough, and they don't truly allow for local health care decision-making. Can the minister give us a rough idea of how many revisions he'll be making before he finally gets it right by dismantling the superboard and giving up the dream of a centrally planned health care system? Follow the Wildrose plan.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I don't think anybody is going to be following the wild plan at all, and certainly I won't be. But I'll tell you that what we're going to be doing is continuing to improve access to the system, and we're going to continue to reduce wait times. Let me tell you that as of today the emergency inpatient numbers have been reduced very significantly, by about 69 per cent in Calgary alone, and that member should know it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Workers' Compensation Accountability

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Unlike other jurisdictions, the government of Alberta has opted not to have a statutory review provision in the Workers' Compensation Act, but rather it responds on an ongoing basis to issues as they arise. To the hon. Minister of Employment and Immigration: why has the government of Alberta chosen not to follow suit and have a mandated review of the WCB act in, say, four or five years?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member is correct. Some provinces have chosen to have sunset clauses in their WCB legislation, which demand that the provinces every three or five years do an overhaul of the act. Unlike those provinces, we have elected to respond to needs on an ongoing basis, so one doesn't have to wait for three, four, five years to address an issue. That is why, for example, the firefighters' cancer legislation was amended midstream. We have the ability to respond to issues as they arise.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same hon. minister: given that the WCB disability insurance system involves 1.7 million workers and 137,000 employers, with what information and how does the ministry ensure more accountability and fairness to injured workers in the administration of the Workers' Compensation Act and the WCB policies?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In reference to the last question about WCB, indeed, that's how vast WCB is. I have to tell you that a majority of cases are resolved and workers return to work as they want to return, and that's what the system is based on. But there is accountability. There is a board of directors that's appointed by the minister. I have recently appointed a member to the board that has thoroughly reviewed WCB and will provide the board with input. They file their statements of investment and statements of audit with the Alberta Legislature, but ultimately they're responsible to the stakeholders, being employers and workers of this province.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same hon. minister. More than a decade has passed since the last review of the WCB in dealing with injured workers. Would the minister consider having such a review more regularly, perhaps this year or next?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, I look at the act often myself. A thorough review: I'm not sure if it's required. I have to tell you that I made reference that I have appointed to the board a member who partook in the last review of WCB, and I'm sure he will bring many of the matters that he has found in his review of WCB to the attention of the board of directors. In the interim I will be responding to issues as they arise, be it from employers or workers, and make sure that WCB manages itself in an accountable way to both stakeholders.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, and then the hon. Member for Strathcona.

Residential Building Inspections

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In response to serious concerns from Albertans about the Penhorwood catastrophe in Fort McMurray and similar problems faced by condo boards in Edmonton and Calgary, the Minister of Municipal Affairs has indicated that he opposes the licensing of builders and developers, doesn't require accountability from safety code officers, allows contractors and architects to cut costs with impunity, and only demands limited warranty protection for homeowners. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: how can the minister say in all honesty that he's really doing anything of substance to protect

home and condo owners from shoddy construction practices? The evidence suggests otherwise.

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, we are working with all of our municipalities to ensure that proper inspections are taking place. There's no doubt our municipalities, those that are accredited, are out there looking at individual buildings, and they certainly are closer to the local situation to make better decisions. We will continue to work with them to ensure that the inspectors that they hire are doing the right jobs.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the problem is getting worse by the day.

Will the minister release a follow-up report to the April 2008 Building Envelope Survey so that Albertans can get a better sense of what changes are being recommended to the province's building construction and inspection system, and if not, why not?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, just the fact that the chief building administrator has requested additional information on existing situations across the province is an indication that we are trying to do things differently and better. There's no doubt that we are requesting all of that information under the Alberta building code and that we assess through the chief building administrator the needs. If there is a need for changes, we'll do that as part of our ongoing duties and responsibilities.

3:00

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the minister again: will Alberta follow British Columbia's lead by requiring builders to provide longer warranties to homeowners, sir?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, that's again a part of our ongoing discussions. I've indicated in the past that we are working with the construction industry, our municipalities, and our own individual staff and various ministries within the government of Alberta to see if we can make some changes. We are aggressively pursuing various alternatives. I suppose over the next few months we hope to have some information.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Cumulative Effects Environmental Management

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've heard several times in this House that the cumulative effects approach is the future to environmental planning and management in Alberta. The Industrial Heartland, which is right beside my constituency, was the first to begin implementing this new approach for protecting our air, land, and water. My question to the Minister of Environment: what have we actually achieved from the cumulative effects management approach in the Industrial Heartland?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a significant, major success story as we have the first truly functioning project under cumulative effects environmental management. It's the first of its kind in Alberta. It creates a system that supports water demands and improves water quality in the North Saskatchewan. Last week I had the honour of recognizing our multistakeholder group – the city of Edmonton, Lamont county, Strathcona county, Fort Sas-

katchewan, industry – as well as a significant number of very dedicated employees of Alberta Environment.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental to the same minister: given that we already have water frameworks in the province, what's different about the Industrial Heartland water management framework, and how is it actually a move towards cumulative effects?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, what's different about this project is that it brings everything under one umbrella, surface and ground-water along with industrial and municipal water users. There's a common, sustainable goal for the river and for the region. Above all, it was created by a multistakeholder group, where everyone is actively engaged in putting the process together. We've developed scientific methods for water and air to help the environmental management within the entire capital region based upon a lot of the work that went into this project.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Second supplemental to the same minister: while the creation of this framework is great, what are you doing to expand our reach beyond the Industrial Heartland and demonstrate that we're serious about province-wide cumulative effects environmental management?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, members will be familiar with the lower Athabasca regional plan and some of the references in that plan to environmental limits and cumulative effects. What we've learned through the development of this plan allowed us to draft the management frameworks for air, water, and groundwater for the LARP. Similar frameworks will be created for each of the other regional plans as they move forward, and each framework will identify limits and triggers to achieve regional environmental objectives. We intend to build upon existing environmental policy, legislation, and regulations.

The Speaker: Hon. members. that concludes the Oral Question Period for today. Eighteen members were recognized. That's 107 questions and responses.

I must now advise the Assembly of Standing Order 7(7), which reads, "At 3 p.m. the items in the ordinary daily routine will be deemed to be concluded and the Speaker shall notify the Assembly." Now, that means that I should be calling Orders of the Day unless someone wants to rise with respect to a motion that says we should conclude the Routine, which has about seven different sections to deal with.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, thank you. I rise to make such a motion given that we have members' statements, some very important members' statements, particularly affecting some of the people that have joined us in the gallery today, as well as the tabling of the report referred to earlier in Ministerial Statements. I would move that the Assembly give unanimous consent to allow the Routine to proceed to its conclusion.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Members' Statements

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

Bashaw Centennial

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This summer from August 19 to 21 the town of Bashaw will celebrate its 100th anniversary. Bashaw is located in central Alberta about half an hour east of the highway 2 corridor on the junction of highways 21 and 53. The Bashaw area is known for its prosperous agricultural community, productive farms, and diverse livestock industry along with a thriving oil and gas sector. Tourism based on its natural beauty and nearby lakes and golf courses enhances Bashaw as a prime destination on the Boomtown Trail, which is a well-developed series of tourist stops located along highway 21.

The centennial homecoming weekend will host many activities, including music, meals, and historical characters from Bashaw's founding days that will provide a fun and interactive way to learn about Bashaw's history.

As another part of the centennial the Bashaw Historical Society has created a beautiful, two-volume history book called *Over 100 Years of Memories* that contains more than 1,200 family and business stories about the settlement and development of the Bashaw area. Earlier today copies of these books were donated to the Legislature Library so that the stories of Bashaw will be preserved and available for all to read.

Several members of the Boomtown Trail characters in period costume were with us today, and they tell some of the real stories of the history of the area with very realistic and colourful theatrical acting. Two members of the theatre group are here today. Laura Graham and Twyla Chitwood are from Bashaw and play the original historical characters of Mrs. Eugene Bashaw and Dollie Williams.

I attended a centennial kickoff event earlier this year, and the August centennial weekend promises to be a great success and an enjoyable weekend for all in attendance.

I would ask all members to join me in offering congratulations and best wishes to Bashaw as they celebrate their centennial year, and I would encourage all Albertans to come visit Bashaw this summer to experience a real taste of rural Alberta hospitality in a beautiful, relaxing, scenic area.

Thank you.

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

Democratic Renewal

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Democracy lost. As this Alberta government does not believe it is necessary to set or stick to either a legislative session or fixed election dates, approximately half of Albertans who cast their vote for alternative voices are effectively disenfranchised. In 2008 our first past the post system saw government complacency rewarded by voter apathy. Twenty-one per cent of eligible Alberta voters, barely half of the 41 per cent who took the time to exercise their hard-won democratic franchise, gave this government a majority.

As another typically abbreviated parliamentary session draws to a close, a growing government rumour chorus suggests that there will be no legislative sitting either this fall or next spring, which from the Alberta government's perspective effectively prorogues the pesky parliamentary process for over a year. Considering that their federal Conservative counterparts, whose current leader twice prorogued Parliament, whose party was recently found in contempt of Parliament, and whose escalating taxpayer-shouldered debt includes the purchase of motorless military jets, were recently awarded with a national majority, why should Alberta government members concern themselves with the democratic process? Why just limit debate

with time allocations or closures when you have the majority power to shut down the people's parliament for over a year, thus avoiding calls for transparency, accountability, or, worse still, a reputation-damning public inquiry?

From 2008 forward or backward, depending on your point of view, this government has consolidated its dictatorial power by using its deliberately shortened sessions to ram through bills which move debatable legislation to behind-closed-doors ministerial regulatory control. This government's bulldozer attitude is executed with devastating effect across the province from wholesale clear-cutting in the south to growing tailing pond pollution in the north.

To paraphrase the lines from a once-popular song which has become a Conservative government anthem, the rich get rich and the poor get poorer; in the meantime, in between time, ain't we had fun? Mr. Speaker, Albertans deserve better.

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

Holocaust Memorial Day

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Sunday, May 1, 2011, in accordance with the Jewish lunar calendar, Albertans along with citizens around the world remembered the countless victims and survivors of the Holocaust and those who fought to defeat tyranny and genocide on Holocaust Memorial Day. Holocaust Memorial Day, or Yom ha-Shoah, is a time to remember the senseless and systematic annihilation of millions of Jewish people between 1933 and '45 and the many other victims and survivors of genocide, hatred, and discrimination past and present around the world.

In Alberta communities and families observed this day by remembering and recalling the victims of the catastrophe. On Monday, May 2, a commemorative service organized by the Jewish Federation of Edmonton was held at the Holocaust memorial on the Legislative Grounds. Survivors told their stories to educate children and future generations and to reflect on the enduring lessons of the tragedy.

3:10

Yom ha-Shoah is an opportunity for Albertans to reflect upon the tragedy and to look for ways we can each make a difference in our world today. On Holocaust Memorial Day and every day I urge all Albertans to recognize this very important day and, in doing so, reflect on our individual and collective roles in the fight against religious, racial, and other forms of hatred. Yom ha-Shoah is a call to all people, not just the Jewish community, to fight for the common goals of societies that value diversity and protect human rights.

In our province Yom ha-Shoah was officially proclaimed Holocaust Memorial Day by the Alberta Legislature on November 16, 2000, with the passing of the Holocaust Memorial Day and Genocide Remembrance Act. Let us never forget the atrocity that was the Holocaust, those who suffered and those who lost their lives in such a horrific way.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Federation of Calgary Communities

Ms Woo-Paw: Mr. Speaker, the earliest community associations in Calgary were formed during the 1920s to provide formal recreational programs and facilities such as outdoor skating rinks and also social programs. The first official incorporation of a community association, the Elbow Park association, was formed in 1930, and two more, Mount Royal and Scarboro, were registered prior to

World War II. The dramatic population growth after the war correspondingly increased the number of community associations.

During the 1950s one unified voice was seen as necessary to coordinate and liaise with community services to address common concerns. The Federation of Calgary Communities was an initiative of 47 community associations. Incorporated in 1961, this new, large support organization gave its members a way to increase their effectiveness while remaining autonomous.

There are currently 147 community associations in Calgary, with 97 per cent being Federation of Calgary Communities members. It's estimated that annually 20,660 community association volunteers contribute 2.4 million hours of public service at an equivalent monetary value of over \$28 million. These volunteers operate, manage, and maintain facilities and amenities with a value of more than \$250 million. They come from a diverse population base, with about 15 per cent of the city's population supporting the associations through paid membership.

Today the federation supports its members and communities in urban planning, managing their finances, building awareness around volunteerism, celebrating community life, and administering the associations. The Federation of Calgary Communities is committed to enhancing the ability of community associations to provide necessary social and recreational services. In 2010 the federation was recognized by the Governor General.

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

Mental Health Week

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a privilege to rise today in recognizing that this week in May all across Canada is Mental Health Week. This is the 60th anniversary of Mental Health Week, a time that is dedicated to encouraging Canadians of all demographics to learn, talk, reflect, and engage with others on all issues relating to mental health.

This year the theme for this important week is Mental Health for All, which focuses on key topics for a better understanding of our mental health. Those two words, "for all," are key because in today's busy world we must understand that our children also have many stresses. Striking a balance between school or work and families, our physical wellness, and our emotional wellness is extremely important for each and every one of us.

Mr. Speaker, the Mental Health for All fact sheet lists some simple ways to promote good mental health. These ways can range from physical exercise to socializing with others to reading or taking up a hobby; in other words, activities that are relaxing and enjoyable. I personally enjoy relaxing after a busy day with a nice cup of tea and some quiet music. I recommend that we all choose to take some personal time every day to nourish our emotional well-being and our mental health.

One of the key initiatives of our government's five-year health action plan is supporting people with addiction and mental health issues. This includes early intervention with youth who may be susceptible to addiction or mental health issues.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Canadian Tire Jumpstart Day

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise in the House today to recognize Canadian Tire Jumpstart Day, which will be held on May 28 this year. Canadian Tire Jumpstart is a community-based charitable program that helps financially disadvantaged youth participate in organized sport and recreation by

covering registration fees, equipment, and transportation costs. In Canada an estimated 1 in 3 families struggles to include their children in organized sport and recreation.

Canadian Tire Jumpstart supports local kids in need through direct anonymous contributions as well as its network of regional chapters and community partners such as Big Brothers Big Sisters Canada, the YMCA, and parks and recreation. Most importantly, 100 per cent of customer donations to Canadian Tire Jumpstart are reinvested into the local community. Since 2005 the Jumpstart program has helped over 315,000 kids across Canada get involved in activities like hockey, soccer, swimming, and ballet. In Alberta alone over \$2.2 million has helped more than 22,000 kids.

Mr. Speaker, the constituency of Banff-Cochrane is part of the Calgary Jumpstart chapter. Mr. Rob Hatch, whom I introduced earlier, is the dealer of the Cochrane Canadian Tire store and chair of this chapter. His team has distributed over \$700,000 to support over 8,500 kids in just the last six years. This is truly an amazing accomplishment. I would like to thank them for their efforts, congratulate them on their success, and ask each member in the House to join me in recognizing the great work Canadian Tire is doing for families across our province.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Prostate Cancer

Mr. Vandermeer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Prostate cancer affects 1 in 6 Canadian men. More than 90 per cent of prostate cancer cases are curable if detected early. However, far too many incidents are not caught early enough. More than 4,000 Canadian men will die of the disease this year alone. An additional 24,000 men will be diagnosed in Canada this year, not including cases that go undiagnosed due to men failing to go for annual checkups. Prostate cancer has no symptoms in its earliest, most curable stage, and it is important to note that the incidence of prostate cancer is increasing due to the aging of our population.

Mr. Speaker, it is recommended that men who are 40 years old talk to their doctor about a prostate examination. However, more awareness needs to be raised on just how important it is for men to get checked. Awareness and fundraising efforts are already established in our province. Look no further than our own Minister of Sustainable Resource Development's blue hair campaign for awareness.

Each Father's Day Safeway supports a walk or run for dad, raising more than \$1 million last year, and each November the fundraising event Movember challenges men to grow moustaches to raise money. All Alberta MLAs participated on November 1 of this past year by wearing prostate cancer ties and scarves in the Legislature.

I would like to reiterate that while fundraising and awareness efforts are very much appreciated, more can always be done when tackling such a serious issue.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'd like to give oral notice of a motion for leave to introduce a bill being Bill 20, the Workers' Compensation Amendment Act, 2011.

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 19**Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2011**

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to request leave to introduce Bill 19, the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2011.

Bill 19 contains a number of noncontentious provisions. I'll just briefly list those acts which are affected by this particular bill: the Emergency Management Act, the Family Support for Children with Disabilities Act, the Business Corporations Act, the Cooperatives Act, the Land Titles Act, and the Mobile Home Sites Tenancies Act.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 19 read a first time]

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

Bill 207**Seniors' Property Tax Deferral Act**

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 207, the Seniors' Property Tax Deferral Act.

Mr. Speaker, this act may allow more seniors to stay in their homes for a longer period of time, remain independent, and help ensure that they age in the right place.

Thank you, sir.

[Motion carried; Bill 207 read a first time]

3:20 Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm very pleased to table five copies of the vital statistics annual review 2009. This review is a summary of all vital statistics events during the 2009 calendar year and contains information involving births, stillbirths, marriages, deaths, adoptions, and changes of name that occurred in Alberta. Completion of the review often takes upwards of one year as the information provided by hospitals, municipalities, and other organizations is compiled and verified before the review can be finalized. The review is produced primarily to provide the public and health care related professionals with a resource document of provincial statistical data. Once the review is tabled today, Service Alberta will make copies available to medical examiners, hospitals, research clinics, medical associations, universities, colleges, funeral homes, and libraries.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise this afternoon on behalf of the Minister of Energy to table five copies of the draft discussion document Enhancing Assurance: Developing an Integrated Energy Resource Regulator. The document has been created to provide insight and greater detail regarding the operation, key regulatory functions, and processes of the proposed single regulator. The document is designed to elicit feedback on the design structure of the empowering legislation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A number of individuals continue their concerns with regard to clear-cutting in

the Castle wilderness. Among those individuals who have raised their concerns are Richard MacInnis, Charmaine Hollings, Wayne Seibel, Christopher Thomas, Rick Oliver, Skylar Kozak, Mackenzie Devereaux, Laurie Cartman, Susan VanMeter, Michael Pound, Georgia Braithwaite, Bruce Cohen, Hal Trufan, Dale Must, Viviane Tits, Nicola Gunter, David Mondoux, and Wendy Ponomar.

Mr. Speaker, it becomes counterproductive to table pounds of tablings, when you're opposing clear-cutting, that would provide the pulp for the tablings, so I am tabling over 500 names of individuals opposed to Bill 29 that were not previously tabled due to the short fall session. And I'm tabling a letter with over 60 signatures from M'n'M Calgary Senior Outdoor Club who are opposed to Bill 29.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Anderson: Yes. Mr. Speaker, I need to retable some documents. It was brought to my attention, rightly so, that I had included a letter, but it was unsigned. It was actually an attachment to an e-mail. I'm resubmitting this tabling of the five copies of both the e-mail and its attachment together. I've received hundreds of e-mails and letters, et cetera, from people against Bill 50 and who will be voting against this government based on that, but this one I'm tabling in particular because I was asked specifically by the individual to table it, who was not a constituent of mine.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, we had a purported point of order.

**Point of Order
Factual Accuracy**

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much. I rise on my point of order, please, under Standing Order 23(h), "makes allegations against another Member," and (i), "imputes false or unavowed motives to another Member." In question period today the hon. Minister of Employment and Immigration indicated in an exchange with myself regarding the matter of Mr. Bregg and the WCB – you have to understand, Mr. Speaker, that there's a lot of noise in this Assembly, but I do believe I heard the hon. minister indicate that the Workers' Compensation Board, or the WCB, did not discuss this case publicly, and that is simply not true.

There are various media reports, not only from this week but last week, where this is discussed. I would quote – and I'll table this at the appropriate time if necessary. I'll start with today, Monday, May 9, from the *Edmonton Sun*. A WCB spokeswoman has told the *Sun* that Bregg's case is under review. So it has been discussed publicly. Also, last week in the same newspaper, I believe on the 4th of May: "WCB spokeswoman Jennifer Dagsvik said the case is under review, and believes Bregg is being compensated while his file is looked over." The Workers' Compensation Board, it also indicates here, "has declared Bregg fit for work and will likely suspend his benefits after he failed to start a new job Tuesday." This is according to the city of Edmonton.

It's clear that this gentleman, who was working hard, was innocent of any wrongdoing. He was the victim of a violent, vicious attack. The man was doing his job. Now that he's injured, now that he can't earn a living at the moment for himself and he needs further rehabilitation and care – I would certainly urge the hon. minister to withdraw that statement that the Workers' Compensation Board had not discussed this issue publicly.

In conclusion, I would urge the hon. minister to please use his authority, that he certainly has, to get to the bottom of this and ensure that this man is looked after. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Employment and Immigration on this point of order.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, let me start by saying that there is no point of order. One, the citation to which the member refers would allege that I have somehow put words into his mouth or have ascribed some actions or beliefs to him, which obviously is not what he argues, then, in the body of his argument. I have said clearly in question period that the Workers' Compensation Board does not comment on files that they manage, and that is for a very good reason. While the member in question period rose and has expressed a degree of dismay with the fact that, in his opinion, the Workers' Compensation Board discusses the details of this particular file, what he actually has done through his line of questioning in question period and now through his commentary in this particular point of order is discuss the details of that very case, which the Workers' Compensation Board refuses to do and will continue to refuse to do, as will I.

Mr. Speaker, the quotations that the member has just elaborated from the newspaper are clearly cited to the city of Edmonton. The only comments made by the WCB, which are routine comments, are that this file is under review. By no means would the WCB in any respect discuss any particulars relevant to a claimant or an employer in any case that it manages. If that was to be the case, this member knows very well – he's a well-seasoned member of this Chamber – that he should and could and probably would go to the Privacy Commissioner and address that issue through the Privacy Commissioner.

Mr. Speaker, let me say this. What has happened to this particular individual, without knowing the details of the file – all I know is what I read in the media, and what appears does seem despicable, and I hope that the perpetrators are being dealt with properly. Relevant to the WCB file, any worker who is injured in any way on the job is compensated by the WCB. Decisions are made on medical evidence, and in the event that a decision is made that is perceived to be wrong by either party, there is a process of appeal. In some cases, yes, the minister may review a file and ask for additional reconsideration, but at the end of the day those decisions are made based on factual medical information.

If this member is indeed concerned, as he purports to be, I would suggest to him that the proper course would be to pick up a phone and call my office. Perhaps he wants to advise me of details that I may not be aware of. But there is no point of order, Mr. Speaker. All he is doing is soliciting a debate and creating himself another forum for further disclosing private details of a file that should not be discussed in a public forum.

3:30

The Speaker: Well, I've listened very carefully to both members, and I let it go on much farther than I should have. In addition to the point being made by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, there was a petition to the minister to do some additional intervention with respect to this. Then I allowed the hon. minister to go on forward basically clarifying what this is all about and providing some guidance or opinion on this. I think it served the purpose of everybody being listened to and everybody paying attention to it and everybody understanding what this is. It strikes me that this is what the minister said. "Workers' Compensation has not been discussing this [matter] in public either," and "I will not discuss this case in public." From the position of the hon.

Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar the mere fact that the minister said that means that the case is under review. Okay. That clarifies a lot.

Orders of the Day

Written Questions

[The Clerk read the following written questions, which had been accepted]

Special-needs Student Assessments and Supports

- Q14. Mr. Hehr:
How many appeals were filed in Alberta concerning the assessments and supports provided to special-needs students in each of the years 2005-2010, and how many of these appeals were successful?

Alberta Creative Hub

- Q19. Ms Blakeman:
As of March 11, 2011, what is the current status of the Alberta Creative Hub that the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit announced in June 2010 and which had received \$1.4 million from his ministry's budget?

Postsecondary Education Spaces

- Q20. Dr. Taft:
How many postsecondary spaces in government of Alberta priority areas were created by funding from the enrolment planning envelope before the funding became a part of the Campus Alberta fresh start grant in budget 2010-11?

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

PDD Support Qualification Rate

- Q15. Ms Pastoor asked that the following question be accepted.
As of March 11, 2011, how many people qualify for supports under the persons with developmental disabilities program but are unable to access these supports?

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

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the minister for seniors I would like to propose an amendment to this question. I understand that copies of the amendment have been circulated to all members. For the record the amendment reads that Written Question 15 be amended by striking out "March 11, 2011" and substituting "February 28, 2011." The amended written question will read as follows: "As of February 28, 2011, how many people qualify for supports under the persons with developmental disabilities program but are unable to access these supports?"

Mr. Speaker, the PDD program gathers wait-list information from community boards at month end, not mid-month. For this reason we are unable to respond to the question as originally written because that information is not collected and not reportable in the manner requested. I would ask that all members accept the amendment to this question.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With that amendment coming forward, I am pleased to accept that amendment, and I'm

hoping that the information will be coming to me very readily as the date is the end of February.

[Motion on amendment carried]

[Written Question 15 as amended carried]

Edmonton Hospital Occupancy Rates

Q16. Mr. Chase asked on behalf of Dr. Swann that the following question be accepted.

In 2010 how many days were the University of Alberta hospital, the Royal Alexandra hospital, the Misericordia community hospital, the Grey Nuns community hospital, and the Stollery children's hospital operating at over 100 per cent occupancy, broken down by hospital?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. minister of health.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. I'm pleased to inform this member and all members in the House that we will be accepting this question.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I look forward to your response.

[Written Question 16 carried]

Comparative Hip or Knee Procedure Costs

Q17. Mr. Chase asked on behalf of Dr. Swann that the following question be accepted.

What is the average cost per procedure of privately delivered hip or knee procedures and the average cost per procedure of a publicly delivered hip or knee procedure?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. minister of health.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much. Thank you again for the question. I'm pleased to inform this member and all members that we will be accepting that written question as well.

[Written Question 17 carried]

Continuing Care Wait-lists

Q18. Mr. Chase asked on behalf of Dr. Swann that the following question be accepted.

What is the number of people on wait-lists for continuing care in Alberta, broken down by zone, with individual lists of how many are waiting in acute-care beds and how many are waiting in the community?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. minister of health.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In accordance with what I've said on 16 and 17, I'm pleased to inform this member and all members that we'll be accepting Written Question 18 as well.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, while I very much appreciate the acceptance, I'm not sure why that information wasn't provided earlier so that we could dispense with this to and fro, so to speak.

[Written Question 18 carried]

Motions for Returns

[The Acting Clerk Assistant read the following motions for returns, which had been accepted]

Proposed Alberta Pension Plan

M13. Mr. MacDonald:

A return showing a copy of all reports, studies, financial forecasts, or materials prepared for Finance and Enterprise regarding the creation of an Alberta pension plan.

Northland School Division Board of Trustees

M14. Mr. Hehr:

A return showing copies of all documents that illustrate the Ministry of Education's attempt to work with the board of trustees of the Northland school division prior to the termination of the board in January 2010.

Child and Family Services Authorities

M16. Mr. Chase:

A return showing copies of any evidence that was used in the decision to transition child and family services authorities to an outcome-based service delivery model.

Infrastructure Hosting Expenses

M12. Mr. Kang moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a list of all hosting expenses under \$600 for the Ministry of Infrastructure, itemized by event and amount, for each of the fiscal years 2004-05, 2005-06, 2006-07, 2007-08, 2008-09, and 2009-10.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This motion for a return asks for an itemized list of Infrastructure's hosting expenses under \$600 for the last six fiscal years. It is simply not feasible or reasonable to provide this information through a motion for a return process. First of all, Infrastructure did not exist as a stand-alone ministry between 2004-05 and 2006-07, and for those years that we did exist as a stand-alone ministry, providing that level of detail would take an inordinate amount of staff time, time to retrieve and restore archived information, time to analyze and review that information, time to itemize the detailed records, time far better spent serving Albertans.

3:40

Mr. Speaker, this is a time- and labour-intensive request, which will take time away from the services Albertans expect from their government. If this information is so important to this member, I would suggest that he make a FOIP request and pay the considerable cost required to gather that information.

Mr. Speaker, I recommend that members reject this motion for a return. Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to speak?

Mr. Kang: Mr. Speaker, this is all about accountability to the citizens of Alberta, the people who pay our salaries. That's why we ask for this type of information. Light is the best disinfectant, and knowing how much the ministry has spent on hosting – and that is food and drinks – helps to keep politics out of the backroom and works to assure the people that their money isn't being mispent.

You know, that shouldn't be an excuse not to provide this. Other governments across Canada are more proactive about releasing this information, something we hope to see from this government in the future, not only now releasing a summary of the expenses but actual cost breakdowns, including receipts and how many individuals were present, to help better determine whether expenses were reasonable.

That we need to use a motion for a return to bring this information to the daylight is something we want to see fixed, Mr. Speaker. I urge all the members to accept my motion for a return and have the information released. This information should be readily available. You know, with one touch of the button we should be able to get it, Mr. Minister, an efficient minister like you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall has closed debate.

[Motion for a Return 12 lost]

Proposed Calgary Maternal/Newborn Centre

M15. Mr. Chase moved on behalf of Dr. Swann that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all documents containing planning information regarding the Calgary maternal/newborn centre, which was part of Health and Wellness's three-year capital plan in Budget 2009.

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

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With respect to Motion for a Return 15 we will have to reject this particular motion. It's not a rejection of information. It's simply a rejection because we're already doing this project, and I'd just like your permission to proceed to briefly explain why.

The Calgary maternal/newborn centre project did not go forward, actually, because Alberta Health Services in their 2011 to 2014 facility infrastructure capital submission did not identify the need for this project, particularly because Alberta Health Services had already included a high-priority request for the women's health program redevelopment project at the Peter Lougheed Centre, the hospital in east Calgary.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, in December 2010 as part of the 2010 to 2013 health capital plan the Alberta government approved capital funding in the amount of \$11.6 million from the capital transition initiative for the women's health program redevelopment project at that particular Peter Lougheed Centre. Therefore, the dollars allocated for the design phase of the Calgary maternal/newborn centre, roughly \$196,000 as part of Budget 2009, were never spent by AHS because they did not require those dollars. Why not? Well, the planning phase for that project as worded in the motion did not have to occur; therefore, there is no planning documentation the way that the motion requests.

As a result, I should say that the next opportunity for Alberta Health Services to identify the need for any additional maternal/newborn related capital projects in Calgary will actually come forward as part of their Alberta Health Services 2012 to 2017 facility infrastructure capital submission. I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that we expect to receive that particular documentation in June or July of this year.

It's important to note that there are projects under way that have already added or will be adding maternal services and capacities in that regard in Calgary. I've already explained the women's health program, a redevelopment project at the Peter Lougheed Centre. I think it's important to note that this redevelopment project is actually proceeding right now, and it's expected to be

completed by 2013. It will provide a much-needed increase in clinical capacity. It's also important to note that Alberta Health Services has not yet finally determined the exact number of new beds for maternal services, but they have confirmed that they are adding five more delivery rooms and one operating room.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, the east Calgary health centre and the Cochrane health centre are now open, and both of them have some basic ambulatory, maternal/newborn services available.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, the Calgary south health campus. This is an extremely important project in southeast Calgary, as we all know. At that location clinical programming has been revised for the south health campus to accommodate maternal/newborn services. In 2008 a service utilization review was completed and recommended the inclusion of maternal health in phase 1 of the south health campus. In fact, the Calgary south health campus will now include 28-bed in-patient units for maternal/newborn services and 16 special-care nursery beds and two labour and delivery operating rooms and one outpatient module specifically for women's health.

Mr. Speaker, in conclusion, when these services and programs actually come on stream is still a little bit in flux, but we're well along the way with the planning and the design and the construction, all of which is nearing completion over there for an opening sometime next year. It is all net new capacity.

It's for those reasons, hon. member, that we do not need this particular motion accepted. It's important to note that it's already being done elsewhere, elsewhere.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on behalf of the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition to conclude debate.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. The reason for this question is that the idea of a maternal/newborn centre was a controversial discussion in the city of Calgary. There were two schools of thought. Possibly having the newborn centre centred at the Children's hospital was one of the considerations, and then the alternate consideration was that this service, as the minister explained, be provided at a variety of centres.

One of the concerns that led to this question was the fact that with the closure of the General hospital and the closure of the Holy Cross, access to these formerly provided services was no longer provided. Likewise, although the Grace hospital didn't provide birthing opportunities, it did provide excellent care for mothers leading up to delivery and care of mothers following the delivery. The concern was: what had the Alberta Health Services finally determined with regard to centralizing the services? From the minister's answer it sounds like the Peter Lougheed will be the primary location for the newborn services but that there will be backups at the south hospital and also potential supports in Cochrane.

I appreciate the minister's clarification. I wanted to provide the background for the question.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion for a Return 15 lost]

3:50 Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 204 Justice System Monitoring Act

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

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and speak to my private member's Bill 204, the Justice System Monitoring Act. The goal of this bill is simple: track the criminal justice process so we can identify bottlenecks and delays in the justice system. This act was borne from the safe communities task force, that I was honoured to chair. The committee included a judge, a police chief, and those in the rehabilitative field. I travelled the province listening to experts and Albertans so I could give voice to their concerns. They wanted to know why it could take years for a court case to reach a verdict, why accused persons are not showing up for their court dates, and why lawyers are consistently asking for more time. All of these issues lead to one thing: delayed justice.

The Premier accepted our recommendations. I sat in on a press conference as he said that implementing the recommendations was a top priority for his government. It was a priority of this government to streamline the criminal justice process and to track indicators and results of the system. Neither one has been accomplished.

Much like our health care system makes patients wait, our justice system makes victims wait. I believe that justice delayed is justice denied. Victims cannot move on without closure. An emotional toll is taken from victims. The dream of justice often turns into a nightmare as the case slowly works its way through the system. While it is true that criminal laws are made by the government of Canada, it is the provincial government that administers justice. Albertans are concerned that this government is ignoring its duty to administer justice in a timely manner. The Ministry of Justice must do a better job of handling court cases in a reasonable amount of time.

Victims of crime are not the only ones to suffer from chronic delays in our justice system. Our remand centres and courthouses are overflowing. Crown prosecutors and judges are overworked. Quite frankly, we need to take practical and tangible action now.

The first step towards a better system is understanding the challenges we face. We need to measure progress so we know when we started and how far we've come. Bill 204 will mandate that the Ministry of Justice track and present different measures of efficiency for the people of Alberta. The suggested measures are a great start to cover the major aspects of the justice system. Too often performance measures are created by a ministry that sets the bar too low, with standards that are not even relevant. The Justice System Monitoring Act will track the length of time from laying a charge until a concluding verdict, the total time of court hearings in a case, the length of time between reporting an offence and laying a charge, number of delays exceeding three months, number of prosecutors involved on each file, number of adjournments granted, number of trials that begin on their designated date, approximate cost of delays in terms of peace officers and prosecutors as well as witnesses, victims, and jurors.

A problem cannot be understood without the proper information. It is easy to speculate about a solution when the necessary information is unavailable. With the passing of this bill we will have a starting place so that we will know how far we've come or, for that matter, how far we've fallen. The data will fuel a debate in and out of government on how well justice is being respected and delivered in this province.

The workings are simple. The ministry will have six months after the calendar year-end to present a report online providing the statistics outlined in the act. If the House is not sitting, the report must be tabled within 15 days of the next sitting. The tabled report will be referred to the relevant committee. Six months after the committee receives the data, they will report to the House. The minister will have three months after the committee's report to respond. The process is quite simple and quite straightforward.

Much the way Albertans anticipate a report from the Auditor General, they will look forward to the latest data on the justice system. They will finally have a way of gauging how well the courts are operating.

Frankly, the importance of justice has been forgotten. For some, reminding the government of its duty and its obligation implies revenge. Why someone would think this is beyond me. Nothing could be further from the truth. Justice is about fairness, and it's about balance. When your home is broken into or you are threatened at knifepoint, something greater than money or property is at stake. Your sense of safety is shattered.

When someone is victimized, they need to heal. Having their pain dragged through the courts, bogged down with adjournments and delays leaves a victim helpless. Delays break the faith that people have in their government. Not only do we have delays in our justice system; we have delays in the victims of crime fund. Funds are set aside for these victims, who have trouble financially and emotionally recovering from a traumatic experience. Recovery can be a financial hardship. Applicants to the fund are waiting 11 to 12 months for any kind of compensation. Victims of violent crime need the justice system, and it just doesn't seem to be there.

Having been the Solicitor General, I greatly admire the staff that work in our justice system. Crown prosecutors, judges, and other court staff sometimes feel overwhelmed. The government has not made the justice system a priority. New laws have been passed session after session, but the tools and the resources to follow through are not there. No one in the legal system has time to waste. Verdicts should be delivered so that everyone, especially victims, can move on with their lives.

Delayed justice doesn't just hurt victims. Witnesses often take risks by stepping forward to see that criminals are put behind bars. I know many of my constituents who want to do the right thing, and they want to testify. They take time off work at their own expense and go to court, and a lawyer will ask for an adjournment or a delay of some sort, often on a small procedural ground, and it is granted. Now a well-intended citizen has been financially penalized for doing the right thing, ensuring that the justice system can do its job.

Albertans are asking: "Where is the accountability? Where does the buck stop?" Frustrated victims, witnesses, and others see everyone point fingers at someone else. The buck stops with the government. The provincial government's responsibility is the administration of the justice system. They must answer for delays. They must deliver justice. Bill 204 is a necessary first step to making that happen.

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

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to have the opportunity to rise today and join the debate on Bill 204, the Justice System Monitoring Act, which is being brought forward by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. This bill proposes to implement a tracking system for the Justice department that would monitor various measures of efficiency within the criminal justice system.

Some of the proposed data to be measured would include the number of cases where there is a delay of more than three months, the number of prosecutors involved on a file, and the approximate cost of trial delays. An efficient justice system is important to all Albertans and should be a top priority. However, Mr. Speaker, I don't think Bill 204 would provide us with the necessary means to create a more efficient system. This is because it does not provide any relevant information on how excessively monitoring these measures will help meet efficiency goals.

Bill 204 has too many variables that would need to be considered in each of the areas that it proposes to measure for it to be an effective tool for the justice system. The processes that are being proposed in this legislation are also time consuming, and there are already resources in place that are being developed to make the justice system more efficient.

For example, Mr. Speaker, the justice system already has a program in place called the court case management program. The objective of this program is to more effectively manage criminal cases in provincial courts. This program makes it possible for Provincial Court judges and Crown prosecutors to only appear in court for significant or more serious cases while more minor ones can be delegated to paralegals and justices of the peace. As a result, cases are dealt with in a hierarchy that ensures only the means necessary are used when processing them. This secures more resources for the other cases.

As well, the court case management program enacts a process of Crown file ownership. This means that the responsibility for a file is vested in one prosecutor, who is then accountable for its progress from the beginning to the end of the court process. Mr. Speaker, this ensures that time is not being wasted as several people do not have to review and become familiar with the file as it is passed through the criminal justice system.

This program also makes use of specialized courts, which, in turn, allows more time to be allotted to cases that do not fall into these specialized categories. This, in turn, ensures that the judges and prosecutors in these areas are able to gain experience and expertise on the issues, which ensures more consistency in the treatment of cases. Initiatives such as these make our court system more efficient and more fair for all Albertans.

4:00

Similarly, another program that is employed by the justice system is the justice innovation and modernization of services initiative. The goal of this initiative is to streamline the system through the use of modern technology. The implementation of a new, modern system will likely improve the effectiveness of the system. Through the use of this program the public has greater access to information. Similarly, this program works with other divisions to develop baseline measures and to identify bottlenecks within the system. Ultimately, Mr. Speaker, the justice innovation and modernization of services initiative already provides solutions to issues that Bill 204 raises.

Bill 204 could also be considered time consuming and extraneous because the Alberta justice system already has a business plan in place that has very similar objectives to this piece of legislation. The business plan makes use of the Ministry of Justice annual report, which tracks several different performance procedures in order to measure the proficiency and efficiency of the justice system. Some of the measures included are the median lapse time from the first to last appearance and the number of days from when a charge is laid to disposition. Also, the department tracks the length of time from the laying of a charge until a final judicial determination is made on the matter. This report is available to the public and provides statistical data which analyzes performance measures of the criminal justice system.

Mr. Speaker, I think that it is important to note that Alberta is doing well compared with other jurisdictions that are measuring similar provisions. This shows that Alberta has a commendable and efficient justice system. It also shows that the provisions that are already in place are working.

Finally, Bill 204 does not take into account the many factors that influence time to trial. Some of these important performance indicators include whether a bail hearing is necessary, if the ac-

cused is retaining counsel, Legal Aid Alberta's processing times, and the time that it takes for the defence to review the case. Without looking at these multiple variables, it would be difficult and time consuming to create a tracking system that is both effective and accurate. Ultimately this legislation would require extensive data retrieval, which could be a very costly procedure. There are only so many resources available to collect and track this data, resources that could be more useful if employed elsewhere. Also, Mr. Speaker, as I stated before, this bill does not give a clear understanding of how these specific pieces of data will create a more efficient criminal justice system.

Bill 204 is also redundant because we already have an extensive collection of data at our disposal. We need to work with the mechanisms that are already in place and give them an opportunity to work. We must make sure that we are efficiently using the resources within the department rather than forcing the department to gather statistics.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for introducing this proposed legislation for debate. Although Bill 204 aims to address relevant issues, I think that it has drawbacks, and I don't think it is an efficient use of our resources. I'm in full support of efficiency in our justice system, and that is why we should focus on improving our current system and support the procedures that are already in place.

For these reasons I will not be supporting Bill 204, and I urge all my colleagues to do the same. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I want to clarify that I am supportive of the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek's Bill 204, Justice System Monitoring Act. That does not mean that all members of my caucus are necessarily supportive. We as Liberals take pride in the fact that we're individuals and that we make up our minds individually as opposed to being whipped collectively into a decision.

I support this bill on a number of counts. One, Mr. Speaker, is the fact that I tried to create a degree of efficiency within the children and youth court system when I brought forward Motion 511 calling for a unified family court. That was the common practice in the majority of other Canadian provinces. Now, the Children and Youth Services minister of the time suggested that I needn't worry, that the efficiencies existed, and that the family enhancement act would cover all these circumstances. Despite that and with the support of the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays, who amended my motion to say "unified family court process," the concept was unanimously accepted by this House. Unfortunately, here we are in 2011, and the complications within Children and Youth Services and court processes continue.

One of the concerns with regard to justice delayed, justice denied is the number in my particular portfolio of children involved in the court system for a variety of reasons – whether it has to do with delinquency, whether it has to deal with guardianship, custody, the result of divorce, et cetera – who are forced to seek Legal Aid lawyers, who are not specialized in children and youth services. As a result, when the preparation is done and the information is presented, because of the lack of experience that these individuals have, the whole court process is delayed.

Mr. Speaker, I have gone to court a number of times as an observer with regard to cases involving Children and Youth Services where the case could not continue because important documentation evidence was not available, and therefore dates had to be reset. So the time of all the individuals involved – the prosecutor, the judge, the representative of Children and Youth Services, the

representative of the various individuals seeking custody, the legal representative appointed for the child – was all wasted because the information hadn't been provided.

A number of times individuals have sought the professionalism required to argue their case, and that individual because of their authority and reputation has so many cases that when they go to try and argue their particular case on a particular day, if they can't present that information before the judge on behalf of their client, then more bookings go. So the lawyers basically scrum and compare notes with the judge and find out what the next available date will be. It could be months down the road. The child could be removed from their family for no reason other than the court having trouble getting various bits and pieces of its act together.

The first step in solving a problem is to define what the problem is, and this is what Bill 204 is indicating, a statistical analysis of the problem. You have to know what your problem is if you're going to attempt to resolve it. The first step in healing, or in this case correcting or beginning to address the problem, is admitting that you have a problem.

Now, the hon. Member for St. Albert, in his opinion, didn't believe there was a problem, and therefore he felt that Bill 204 was the remedy for a nonexisting problem. Well, I would suggest to all members, when they have an opportunity to support a constituent, to go in and witness some of the obstacles to justice that people experience, whether it's witnesses failing to show up, whether it's the accused not being able to get the legal representation needed or trying to represent themselves when they don't have the capability of doing so, not having sufficient legal aid lawyers because the government has cut back on the funding, the ability of the legal aid lawyers to specialize as opposed to having the best of intentions in terms of working for a pittance of what a regular trial lawyer would receive. They have the best of intentions and large hearts, but being unable to provide the specific information delays the process.

4:10

Mr. Speaker, I don't want to delay the process, but I want to highlight some of the concerns in Bill 204, the Justice System Monitoring Act, introduced by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, who has had years of experience in the ministry and various ministries related to justice. The act would require detailed statistical reporting on a range of matters that affect the time it takes for a criminal matter to proceed through the court system. The minister would be required to table a report for review by a legislative committee. This is all about transparency and accountability. It's about timelines. It's about shining a spotlight on a problem that I and, obviously, the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek believe exists in this province.

It's generally agreed that court delays are an important issue. According to the most recent Statistics Canada data, 2006-07, Alberta had the second highest mean elapsed time to complete a case in adult criminal court: 270 days. Quebec was even worse at 294 days. The model for a program to address court delays in Ontario, justice on target, JOT, requires the dedication of resources, but it does not require reporting at the level of detail proposed here. It addressed the problem but doesn't require the reporting of it. Here we're looking for reporting as well as addressing. Alberta Justice has a performance measure on this matter, a measure reported by Statistics Canada. It is the median elapsed time from first to last appearance, that is currently reported.

The importance of timely administration of justice. Delays pose risk for the administration of justice. Delays may result in the loss of evidence or issues about the chain of evidence, as I have previ-

ously provided an example of, the disappearance of witnesses, and the unreliability of testimony, especially eyewitness testimony, after long periods. Since the Supreme Court of Canada decision in *R. versus Askov* unreasonable delay has serious consequences: charges can be stayed, i.e. suspended.

We've also seen the lack of justice being provided for both the person accused and the victim. In the case of the person accused we've seen cases of double and triple bunking in remand centres where the person has been accused but not found guilty and receives no educational counselling and very little psychological support or counselling while they're facing a highly crowded condition regardless of whether they have actually committed the crime. In the case of the victim of the crime, if the person in remand is later found guilty, then it's an additional delay, so justice isn't carried out.

Public safety. Accused persons released on bail may reoffend, an issue in a recent Alberta case of impaired driving, or flee.

The rights of the accused. Accused persons may be held in custody in remand without having been convicted for possibly even longer than the sentence for the offence. Accused persons released on bail may be subject to conditions, limited freedom of movement, be unable to obtain employment, and may have difficulty renting a home while charged with an offence. Persons held in remand are subject to harsher conditions than in correctional institutions: crowding, no access to rehabilitation programs, as I mentioned.

Then, of course, the rights of the victims. Victims can be distressed or intimidated as a result of coming into contact with an accused released on bail. Victims may not be able to get effective access to victim services until there is a conviction, have no possibility of restitution until sentencing, and often cannot move on with their lives until the matter is settled.

Efficiency. Delays can be costly for all participants. [Mr. Chase's speaking time expired]

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

Mr. Benito: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to have an opportunity to participate in the second reading debate on Bill 204, the Justice System Monitoring Act, proposed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. The purpose of Bill 204 is to implement the tracking and presentation of various statistics in relation to the criminal justice system at the end of its calendar year. Specifically, these statistics would be accessible to the public and would include but not be limited to the approximate cost of trial delays, the number of prosecutors involved in a file, and the length of time from the laying of a charge until the final judicial determination of the matter.

Although the intentions of this bill are commendable, I do not support this bill because it is an addition to modernizations that have already been implemented in the criminal justice system. Mr. Speaker, as we know, the provincial government is accountable for the management and administration of Alberta's criminal justice. Therefore, it is in the best interests of the Justice department to streamline its processes in order to efficiently use resources and time. This is what Alberta Justice is already working towards through the justice innovation and modernization of services initiative, or JIMS for short.

I would like to take this opportunity to discuss one of the JIMS initiatives, the court case management program. The aim of the court case management program is to increase public trust in our criminal justice system by more effectively handling criminal cases in Edmonton and Calgary provincial adult courts. The goals of the program and the goals of Bill 204, proposed by the hon.

member, are very much on the same track. Given the similarity between the programs under way and the Justice System Monitoring Act it may not be a responsible decision to implement Bill 204 as it would take time, money, and other valuable resources that could be better allocated.

Mr. Speaker, the court case management system is an effective program already in place in our justice system, which even further diminishes the need for additional spending on publicly available data compilation. The program was brought into place to increase confidence in our justice system as well as to respond to increased pressures and demands on judicial clerks and Provincial Court judges. These are matters that the government is taking very seriously, as evident through the implementation of this program.

In response to these concerns the court case management program encompasses many features to improve our justice system. With regard to the increased demand on judicial members the case management office counter has been put into service. This program appoints administrative court matters to appropriate and qualified professionals, which in turn frees up the Provincial Court judges and Crown prosecutors so they can concentrate on more significant matters. This improved allocation of valuable resources is just one method the court case management system employs to streamline the system.

In addition, the case management office counter deals with adjournments. With many adjournments not occurring in court, tracking the number of adjournments granted to Crowns and defence, like Bill 204 would do, may not be a practical or useful measure of court efficiency. Mr. Speaker, that is why initiatives such as the case management office counter are what the Provincial Court of Alberta in Edmonton and Calgary require to evolve.

I would also like to comment on the advanced system introduced in response to file ownership in the courts. One of the statistics Bill 204 aims to track and publicize is the number of prosecutors involved in a file. The court case management program already addresses this topic with the Crown file ownership system. This system assigns management of a court file from commencement to termination to one Crown prosecutor. This ensures accountability for one prosecutor and decreases the amount of time and energy required to review files that may otherwise be passed through several individuals. However, it is often necessary for more than one prosecutor to be involved in a file due to various factors. That is why tracking the number of prosecutors, which Bill 204 aims to do, is probably not the best measure of efficiency in the courts. Appropriate and well-executed changes to the criminal judicial system such as the Crown file ownership system are what boost confidence in our courts, Mr. Speaker.

I would also like to address some of the technological modernizations brought into play with the court case management program. In accordance with the Crown file ownership system the prosecutor information system manager, or PRISM system, has been introduced to allow access to trial dates, criminal records, and client information. Also, a remote, web-based scheduling system allows for more convenient and efficient court bookings.

4:20

Mr. Speaker, in addition to the successful advances to the Provincial Court, the court case management program has also introduced a day-of-scheduling approach. This grants a greater number of cases to be processed and a more even distribution of trial work. For example, in Edmonton and Calgary courts unless all witnesses are present and accounted for the trial will not proceed. If the trial is unable to begin due to something like an absent witness, the court case management program's day-of-scheduling

method eliminates any wasted court resources by accommodating other cases. So the Minister of Justice is already doing something to increase the number of trials that start on time.

Mr. Speaker, I am obviously in favour of improving our Provincial Court system. Increased efficiency and better use of court resources are an important initiative. This is exactly what is being done through the court case management program. The tracking and publicizing of statistics, some of which are already public through the Ministry of Justice business plan and annual report, on their own are a way to improve our courts. For this reason I will not be supporting Bill 204, and I encourage other members of this House to do the same.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to be able to rise and participate and join in on this debate on this private member's bill, the Justice System Monitoring Act. I appreciate the work and the commitment that the member has demonstrated in bringing this bill forward. It, I think, reflects a concern that many of us here in the Legislature hear from our constituents day in and day out in that Albertans want to know that their communities are safe. Albertans want to be safe, and they want to know that if something happens and that breaks down and if, heaven forbid, they or someone they know becomes a victim of crime, the system which we have in place to address that is effective and will address and stop and prevent that crime from occurring again.

We need a system that is responsive to the factors which drive the occurrence of crime in our communities. Certainly, ensuring that the justice system functions more efficiently and effectively is one part of that.

One piece in this bill that I think is helpful for me is that by having these pieces of information publicly available, it ensures a greater level of accountability on the part of the government for failures within the system that would negatively impact the statistics that this particular bill would ensure that we regularly keep and publicize. Because so many people's interactions with the justice system are often driven by much bigger issues, much bigger systemic things that we are not paying adequate attention to, I think anything that we can do to keep accountability in place and to ensure that we can itemize and touch and talk about places where the system is not working as well as it could is a good thing.

Now, if I had my way with this, in the best-case scenario I'd like to potentially see it referred to a committee so we could review the particular statistics that are being asked for in this case and perhaps do some consultation with various people within the community, not only within the current bureaucratic system of providing and managing the court system but also in terms of law enforcement personnel as well as victims' groups as well as legal groups as well as community groups and other stakeholders to ensure that we're getting at all those different measures that matter to Albertans, who are concerned about living in safe communities.

Notwithstanding that, I think the idea, again, is important for the purposes of tracking our law enforcement efforts. But I have to say that, you know, this was one of the recommendations that came out of the 2007 safe communities task force. I will say that there were a lot of things that were in that set of recommendations that, quite frankly, the government has not addressed. What I see this bill doing – it's a way to consistently keep the government accountable for failing to address those components.

So what are some of the big ones? I mean, there are many because, of course, the existence of criminal activity within our

communities is – obviously, there's no simple answer. It's a very complex issue.

But there are key things that I know we haven't been able to respond to as much as I think we should. The whole issue around the availability of mental health services in a preventative way. The availability of addictions and treatment services in a preventative and post-incident manner because you can have someone who gets into the justice system for a relatively – I don't want to say minor – less serious offence that's primarily arising as a result of an addictions issue. Then they get suckered into a system which is completely incapable of providing the kinds of addictions support that they need in order to actually rehabilitate and indeed may well enhance the addiction issues while they're in the system. Then we have somebody leaving the system even more inclined to potentially engage in even more serious levels of criminal activity. You can see that the delays in the system are only one small part of this dynamic, yet these kinds of measures would identify that kind of problem.

Another issue which is really important is the whole issue of having representation within the system both from the prosecutorial side as well as from the defence side. I'm aware that, you know, we have at times faced shortages in terms of finding and keeping consistent, experienced prosecutorial staff. We're currently in a situation where Alberta's Crown prosecutors have a differential salary system where people simply by virtue of when they were hired are paid a differential salary, notwithstanding the fact that they will have been called to the bar at the same time and have exactly the same experience, but they're paid differently. Well, these kinds of silly internal problems, of course, are going to result in our having a problem keeping adequate numbers of prosecutorial staff there to ensure that the system works effectively.

On the flip side, on the defence side, well, I've talked before at much length about how our legal aid system is a nonexistent entity at this point. I mean, it is shameful how we manage legal aid in this province. Of course, the piece of information that we all heard about on the weekend about how a pensioner, who earns less than a thousand dollars a month, who's about to have his house stolen from him by someone who was able to apparently go into court and overrule provincial legislation, couldn't get a lawyer through Legal Aid. You think: oh, wow, if you can't get it there, my goodness, when do you get legal aid? I would say that the answer is often: not ever.

Many of the delays that we see in our justice system come, clearly, from our profound inability to deal with our failure to provide access to legal assistance and legal resources. At least what this bill would do is help identify the number of times that we've seen delays occur because justices are trying to manage the unjust situation of having people come before them without proper representation. Often many justices will simply delay the trial or delay the process because they can't tolerate the idea of someone being prosecuted without some type of legal representation.

Those are some of the kinds of things that we need to deal with. The safe communities task force talked about hiring more police officers. Well, we never hired all the police officers that they said we should hire nor did we hire all the police officers that the government promised we would hire. So, again, if there are delays, it's because we don't have enough people able to be where they need to be in the system to make sure that it doesn't go off the rails.

What are some of the other ones that we've talked about? Well, those are some of them, and I don't want to get into too much detail because I want to let people speak. The only thing that I would say, though, about this court management program that I see some of the government members speaking on from their

speaking notes – what I would suggest is that if that truly is the answer or the alternative to this piece of legislation, then that thing ought to be tabled on a regular basis and maybe could even be tabled tomorrow in this House so that we could get a sense of what it is that we're looking at, and it could be regularly published. Then perhaps we can have an opportunity to look at its construction in order to determine if there's better information that we could get from that process, and we could refine that. But since it's not something that appears to come before this Legislature very regularly or certainly isn't commonly discussed with the public in terms of those measures, I don't see how it would fulfill the purpose that this particular piece of legislation would otherwise.

4:30

At the end of the day I think the issues that we need to address in terms of providing our safe and caring communities are really the bigger ticket items that were originally identified in the safe communities task force, many of which – you know, there were some announcements around them, but if you look sort of globally in terms of the on-the-ground services that we've been able to provide – are still a very small drop in the bucket. We haven't been able to move forward on the kinds of things that we should have if we were really to see measurable reductions in criminal activity in the areas that we targeted. Those are the most important things. I do see the potential for this bill to give members of the public who are concerned about these issues a tool to keep the government accountable.

It's not by any means the panacea, and as I said, I might well myself want to revise the criteria that they were measuring. It's an interesting idea because there is no question that at this point there are a lot of problems in our justice system in terms of how we're able to get cases through it and in terms of the resources that we're able to dedicate to it. We're not seeing the kinds of improvements that we need to, and we are seeing a significant deterioration in terms of the availability of certainly legal aid, that being the most direct area. So this is a good start.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and support Bill 204, the Justice System Monitoring Act, put forward by my esteemed caucus colleague the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. She deserves so many accolades for the work that she's done with regard to the Solicitor General's file both as Solicitor General and while in opposition and for not just the Solicitor General file but the Justice file, particularly as it relates to children, child protection, but also just on issues of criminal justice and transparency in the system and so forth. She's been a wonderful advocate for that, and she's probably done more in that regard for legislation than all the folks in here put together. So I'd like to thank her for bringing this forward.

I'd also like to say that, you know, there's been a lot of talk in the previous speeches by members of the government. They've talked about, you know, that all this reporting is going to cause all kinds of costs and diversion of resources. You know what? Transparency is a great thing. Sunlight and transparency actually is a very small amount of money to put forward. It does cost money to be transparent, but transparency leads to efficiency. When things are being done and there's not light been shone on it, that's when waste and corruption and mismanagement, et cetera, occur.

We see it rampant with this government at this time. They don't like transparency, whether it be in the health care system, whether

it be in multiple different files, and because of that, there's massive mismanagement of the system. So investing in transparency and accountability is always worth the money. If you didn't go by that, then what the government might want to do is say: let's just shut down the Auditor General. That costs money to run the Auditor General's office. Well, no. We do that because it's an investment in transparency and accountability that saves money down the road. So, too, with this bill.

The goal of this bill is simple. It's to track the criminal justice process so that we can identify bottlenecks and delays in the justice system and thereby not only make sure that our justice system is strong and beyond any kind of disrepute but that also we do save money in wasted resources by that transparency.

My support for this bill is simple. The justice system must do better for the people of Alberta than it currently does. Justice is an issue close to my heart as I previously served as parliamentary assistant to the Solicitor General, and I know that the police officers and peace officers as well as the Alberta sheriffs do an amazing job serving and protecting the people of Alberta. Sadly, though, the follow-through is absolutely abysmal. It seems like the hard work of our officers goes to waste as justice is off in the distant horizon. Bill 204 will help us pinpoint exactly where this government and where the system is failing Albertans so that we can remedy it.

We do know this much is fact. Alberta has the second-longest court case line in the country at 270 days. Alberta is also first in defendants not showing up for their court date. A third fact is the most damning. Fifty-six per cent of people in custody have not been convicted of a crime. It is astounding that in this day and age most people in prison haven't even faced a judge and jury yet. Obviously, some have to stay in the system while they await trial and so forth, but 56 per cent, over half? Very unreasonable, especially when compared to other jurisdictions. If they are innocent, they need to be released. If they're guilty, get them tried, convicted, and going to prison. Any time in remand is a credit to convicted criminals. This cannot continue going forward.

A quicker justice system is a better justice system. It's a more trustworthy justice system. The memories of all parties involved are still fresh. Evidence is at hand and ready for investigation. Whether you're a victim or a witness, we are all better served by an efficient and time-efficient justice system.

There are many reasons why our system is clogged, but the number one reason is gross mismanagement by this government. Simply put, the government did not keep pace with the growth in this province. Our population and economy has been booming. A growing economy doesn't just attract the best and brightest. It does do that, but it also attracts low-lives that want to make a quick buck and prey on the weak.

A growing criminal population demands more courts, prisons, judges, and Crown prosecutors. The government has fallen behind. It's been years since new judges and prosecutors, promised in the last election, have been hired. This is another reason we have a clogged justice system. Waiting has become the way of life in Alberta. Patients wait for the health care that they need, and victims of crime wait for their day in court. Delayed justice is justice denied. The average case, as I said, takes 270 days to complete, 270 days. If the defendant doesn't show up or the case has an initial delay, the cases take 338 days, almost a year, to complete. This is simply unacceptable.

Alberta doesn't control the Criminal Code. That's created, of course, and passed in Ottawa. Administering justice is, however, the duty of the province. Edmonton is where the buck stops, this capitol building is where the buck stops on the justice file. Albertans are tired of excuses and finger pointing just like in health, just

like in the energy sector, et cetera. They just want a competent government to administer a system that works.

Step 1 is more information. You cannot find the cure for something if you don't know what's ailing the system specifically. Otherwise, you're flying blind. Only by consistent measuring of the justice system will we know where we've come from and where we are going. Bill 204 mandates that the Ministry of Justice track and publish measures of efficiency for the people of Alberta. The first measures are a fantastic step to cover the major aspects of the justice system. They won't be cherry-picked so that the bureaucrats can look like they're doing a great job as we've seen over and over in our health care system.

The Justice System Monitoring Act will track the following deliverables: first, the length of time from laying a charge until a concluding verdict – obviously, we want that to be as small as possible – the total time of the court hearing in a case; the length of time between reporting an offence and the laying of a charge; the number of delays exceeding three months; the number of prosecutors involved in each file; the number of adjournments granted; the number of trials that begin on their designated day; and the approximation of costs of delays in terms of peace officers and prosecutors as well as witnesses, victims, and jurors.

The way this bill works is simple. Alberta Justice will have six months after the calendar year-end to present a report online providing the statistics outlined in this act. When the House is not sitting, the report must be tabled within 15 days of the next sitting. The tabled report will be referred to the relevant standing policy committee. Six months after the committee receives the data, they will report to the House. The minister will have three months after the committee's report to respond. Imagine that: actually doing work in our standing policy committee.

4:40

Albertans anticipate the biannual reports from the Auditor General, and they will look eagerly to read the latest data on our justice system and discuss ways that we can build a stronger justice system for all Albertans. At last Albertans will have a way of gauging how well their courts are operating.

Tragically the importance of justice has been forgotten. Advocates for justice reform are too often smeared as vigilantes. Nothing could be further from the truth. Frustrated Albertans want their government to work for them. It's perfectly natural to be upset when you took a day off work at your own expense and the hearing or trial was adjourned. Of course you'd be upset if that happened. It happens all the time in our system. A lawyer will ask for an adjournment or a delay of some sort, often on a small procedural ground, and it is granted. Well, now a well-intended citizen has been financially penalized for doing the right thing, ensuring that the justice system can do its job.

Not only is our justice system blocked; so is the victims of crime fund. Badly needed funds are set aside when victims are having trouble recovering physically and emotionally from a brutal crime. Some victims end up permanently disabled. Recovery takes a financial toll. Victims wait 11 to 12 months for compensation. Victims of violent crime need the justice system, and it just doesn't seem to be there.

I look forward to a further discussion on Bill 15, when it is brought forward again today, I assume, by the Solicitor General, to see if some very reasonable requests made by the NDP as well as the Wildrose and Liberals were in fact followed, that victims who were molested as children will not have the 10-year mandatory cut-off that is currently being proposed by the Solicitor General.

I hope this is just the start, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to say a few words today about Bill 204, the Justice System Monitoring Act. First of all, though, I want to acknowledge the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for the work that she did on the safe communities task force. This committee did great work for Alberta. She was the leader of that committee. Their report has really framed a lot of what this government and Alberta Justice have been doing for the last few years. I think the hon. member can be very proud of some of the accomplishments that have been achieved.

I want to say a few words about this legislation. I agree with the intent of it, but I'm going to have to respectfully disagree with the method by which the information is acquired and disseminated. The proposed bill calls for the Ministry of Justice to prepare and present an annual statistical report which would include statistics ranging from the length of time from the laying of a charge until final judicial determination all the way to approximate cost of delays in the commencement of proceedings, delays relating to cost of peace officers, prosecutorial staff, court staff, witnesses, victims, jurors, and so on.

It would be tabled in the House and then sent to a committee for review. The committee would then produce another report within six months of the tabling, and then within three months of that the Minister of Justice would have to file yet another report responding to the response to the original report. So by my account that would be three separate reports within nine months, then just another three months until the process starts again, and on and on.

Again, I appreciate the intent. I do have some concerns about the practicality of enshrining this bureaucratic process in legislation. Some of these measures were in fact brought up in the 2007 Crime Reduction and Safe Communities Task Force. I think there were 31 recommendations, and if my memory serves, 29 of those recommendations were accepted. As I say, a lot of the good things that we've been doing in safe communities is because of those recommendations.

We've been developing a robust internal tracking system. Again, I'm not so sure that we want to see more bureaucracy added to that tracking system. It may be counterproductive. If we're not bound by legislation, we can maybe be more reactive to changing circumstances to gather information that would be more relevant. I notice that the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona said that she wouldn't mind revising the criteria that are referred to in the proposal. That would be my point, that the criteria may change from time to time, and then we would be having to amend legislation in order to keep the criteria and the statistical information relevant. So flexibility, I think, is important.

I think our time and resources would be better devoted to just going ahead and making the improvements, and I would like to make a point about that, too. I don't think there is much debate about the fact that we do have some court delays that we're not happy with. I don't think there's much debate about the fact that we don't like to see a whole bunch of prosecutors handling one file. There are all kinds of things that are already acknowledged, and we're working on them.

As has already been mentioned in some of the earlier comments by some of the other members, we have, for example, a court case management program, which is making a big difference because new and innovative methods of scheduling are being incorporated, and we're taking some of the pressure off the courts in terms of just spending time on scheduling. Crown prosecutors are becoming much more efficient in terms of file ownership, so a

prosecutor is taking a matter through from beginning to end. These types of efficiencies are already being done, they're already being worked on, and I think the proof will be in the pudding. I think we will see an improvement in court waiting times and some of the other frustrations that people have.

I would like to say that we have added more judges. We have added more courtroom staff and prosecutors. In terms of legal aid, some comment has been made regarding legal aid. I again acknowledge the importance of legal aid to our system of justice, but I want to point out that our government has not cut funding to legal aid. As a matter of fact, in the last year we've increased funding to legal aid by about 10 per cent, and since 2006 the funding has increased, I'm told, by some 84 per cent.

That is not to say that there isn't an issue with legal aid funding. I have indicated in this House before that I'm very open to carrying on discussions with the stakeholders – the Alberta Law Society, Legal Aid Alberta, and the federal government – in terms of how we can make our legal aid system more sustainable.

It has already been mentioned, but I'll just reinforce that we do in our business plan make reference to tracking some of these performance measures, and we will continue to do that. We continue to be committed to doing that. There would be no reason why we would not want to make our system of criminal justice more efficient and more responsive. As I mentioned, many of those things are already being done. I just am not convinced that legislating this and creating a heavy bureaucracy or at least a heavy system of multiple reports is necessarily going to get us where we all want to be.

Once again, I would like to acknowledge and thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for raising this issue and bringing this on for debate.

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

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just have five minutes? What's the timeline?

The Acting Speaker: Ten.

Mr. Hinman: Ten. Okay. Excellent. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, we've all become a little too familiar with how governments are prone to waste. Usually they waste money, but we're standing here today to support a bill that would help reduce the wasting of time as well as money. Time is valuable to everyone, but we need to be aware of how valuable it is to those who are affected by crime.

The Alberta justice system is fraught with delays. This is true in many jurisdictions, but in recent years Statistics Canada has revealed that bench warrants that are issued here in Alberta are for 27 per cent of all criminal cases. This is by far the highest rate in Canada, and it's just about twice the average. It is a big waste of time, and frankly it's a provincial embarrassment.

The evening news loves to talk about serious crime. They report on the crime, then they report on the investigation, then they report on the arrest, and then they report on the trials. Albertans have understood that there needs to be a well-planned process to do all of this, and it should never be rushed, but, Mr. Speaker, Albertans wonder why they hear about repeated delays and why justice is not being done more swiftly. They also feel sympathy for the victims of crime, who are denied the peace of closure during an ongoing legal process.

4:50

Mr. Speaker, many have already said it, and we'll say it again: justice delayed is justice denied. To help make improvements in

the administration of justice, we need good statistics on how we are doing. To this end, the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek has brought forward a private member's bill, Bill 204, the Justice System Monitoring Act, which we very much support.

Bill 204 is a simple, realistic, and efficient method of tracking the criminal justice process and eliminating these delays. When the safe communities task force was chaired by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, they came out with many of these recommendations, and the Premier expressed his support. He said in a press conference that implementing these recommendations was top priority. Unfortunately, to date the government has not implemented a single one of our recommendations.

Mr. Speaker, it is my job as a duly elected representative to ask on behalf of Albertans: why hasn't the government been tracking the system and eliminating the delays? Why are these problems continuing unresolved? On principle why were these recommendations not implemented even after the Premier offered what appeared to be such genuine support for them? Hollow words, just like those that were spoken in Strathmore and Fort McMurray on ensuring that seniors were going to have a facility in their local towns. Why are Alberta's adult criminal cases amongst the longest in the country? Why are these cases taking so long to move through the justice system? These questions can be answered, but we need to implement Bill 204 in order to do this because the government has failed to do it.

The system must be streamlined to bring these criminals to justice faster. These delays cost judges, lawyers, civilian witnesses, police officers, and court staff their valuable time, time which we do not have enough of. Many of these people's jobs are paid by taxpayers, so their time is also our money. Why isn't the government working to speed up this process? Nobody seems to know or understand.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, it gets even more embarrassing. A Canadian who is charged with a crime has the right to a bail hearing within 24 hours of their arrest. If there is a delay in the system, the defence lawyer may launch Charter applications to have their client's charges tossed. This is a rare occurrence, but much more common is a defendant avoiding jail time because of a lengthy pretrial custody. It's sad for me to report that currently 56 per cent of all prisoners in Alberta provincial custody have not yet been convicted but are only waiting to go on trial. Until the federal government finally reversed this policy, the sentence of these people was reduced by double or even triple for the time they spent in remand centres. Law-abiding Albertans get pretty upset when they watch those convicted of crimes collecting credits for time they served while they were waiting for the court hearing.

Mr. Speaker, this system is being treated as nothing more than a joke: 50 per cent off for time served. The number of adults behind bars is growing too fast because people are being held in custody while they are waiting to go on trial. Our remand centres have run out of room much faster than our prisons. We are also not keeping up with the number of judges, prosecutors, and courtrooms. Prosecutors in our province are overworked, and this adds to the delay problems.

It cost Albertans \$620 million for the new remand centre. Considering that the number of adults waiting to go on trial increased by 55 per cent between 2006 and 2009 and that they'll probably continue to do so, how much will it cost Albertans before the government addresses these inefficiencies?

Bill 204 contains some practical recommendations on what to track within the Alberta justice system. We believe that by tracking several significant variables in the process, obstacles will be identified and removed. The criminal justice process will be streamlined, and other delays will be reduced.

The Justice System Monitoring Act will track the length of time from laying a charge until the concluding verdict, track the total time of court hearings in a case, track the length of time between reporting an offence and the laying of a charge. It will track the number of delays exceeding three months, it will track the number of prosecutors involved in each file, and it will track the number of adjournments granted, a very important number. It will also track the number of trials that begin on their designated date, another important number. It will track approximately the cost of those delays, perhaps the most important in terms of peace officers, prosecutors as well as witnesses, victims, and the jurors.

Mr. Speaker, this bill was created with the experienced insight of the safe communities task force by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. The committee includes a judge, a police chief, and some in the rehabilitation field. The hon. member took the time to travel across the province and to speak to Albertans about this issue to get a good sense of their concerns.

Albertans want the answers to the following questions. Why are the accused getting away with not showing up for court dates? Why are lawyers frequently asking for more time and receiving it? Why does it take so long for a verdict to be reached? And when they ask, "Why so long?" they're referring to trials that are taking years when they should be taking weeks or months. Of course, what about the victims of those, who need the issue dealt with? It's bad enough that innocent people are made victims of criminal acts. I think it's absolutely sickening that a victim, who may be dealing with the psychological trauma of the crime against them, can be victimized again as they wait years for justice to finally be done. These victims often have a dreaded appointment on the witness stand, where they have to relive their trauma, and to have this hanging over their head longer than is needed is absolutely unacceptable.

It's time to put an end to the injustice. It's time to stand up for the victims of crime, who are being made to wait in pain while the justice process is drawn out too long. It's time to put an end to the delays that allow criminals to treat the system as a joke and drain the public purse while they do it. It's time to pass Bill 204 and get back to distributing justice swiftly.

Mr. Speaker, we can do better and we will do better if we pass Bill 204 and implement the tracking and reporting of the number of incidents and the activities occurring in our justice system. It's important that we address these issues. It's always amazing to me how when the government wants to act, it can rush through a bill, like Bill 50, Bill 36, to do with power, to do with land acquisitions, to pass many bills quickly. I've forgotten the name of the task force of the hon. member.

Mrs. Forsyth: Safe communities.

Mr. Hinman: The safe communities task force. That bill, again, was passed years ago, and it hasn't been implemented. These are the types of things that are very frustrating to Albertans.

Do we have a justice system? The number one complaint that I get from Albertans as I go around and meet with them is that they're concerned that we have a legal system that allows loopholes for criminals to continue to play the system and victimize the victim over and over again. Mr. Speaker, we need to address it. Keeping our communities safe: that's what Albertans want. That's what we as government want, so why don't we act and do it?

We have a great opportunity here to pass this bill, and I'd urge the government and the government members to reconsider, and let's move forward. They always say: if you really want to make improvements, you have to start measuring and reporting. That's what this bill is about. We're going to measure, we're going to

report, and we're going to do better for the people of Alberta, the taxpayers, but, most importantly, for those victims of crime, who just feel like they're being assaulted time and time again as these cases draw out.

I'd urge all members to really sit back and ask themselves: what is it really going to harm to pass this bill?

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, there are 30 seconds left. I can call on another member before we conclude debate on this. Hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore, do you wish to speak?

Mrs. Sarich: Yes, Mr. Speaker, but are you waiting for a response from the Assembly regarding the 30 seconds, or would you like me to continue?

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, the time has concluded for consideration of this item of business, and we will continue on.

Before I call on the hon. member, may we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests (reversion)

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

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In a few moments I will be introducing Motion 505 to encourage visitability in homes, allowing people with limited mobility increased access to private residences.

Today we have guests joining us in the House to listen to the debate, and it's my honour and pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Legislature two individuals from the Canadian Paraplegic Association, Brian McPherson and Ross Norton. These individuals are dedicated to expanding opportunities in our communities for persons with disabilities, such as broadening social activities and finding meaningful employment. I'd like to thank them for their hard work and welcome them to the debate in the Assembly this afternoon. They are seated in the public gallery, and at this time I'd ask them to wave and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

5:00 Motions Other than Government Motions

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

Single-family Home Accessibility Standards

505. Mr. Dallas moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to utilize incentives to encourage visitability standards in all newly constructed single-family homes, including one zero-step entrance, wider doorways (minimum 32-inch clear door opening), and a main floor half bathroom.

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and begin debate on Motion 505. I'm introducing this motion because I believe that it has the potential to help people with decreased and limited mobility interact more fully with their community. In addition, if homes are built with visitability standards, people recovering from injuries or as they are aging can have a continued ability to visit friends in their homes. The wind is at our back today. Albertans from across this great province and, indeed, across Canada have voiced their support for this motion.

Before I begin, I'd like to acknowledge the support of my good friend Marlin Styner for the technical advice, the support, and the encouragement that he has provided in developing this.

Creating incentives to encourage these standards helps build strong communities and enhances the quality of life for Albertans. Visitable is a technical term used to describe a house that is easy to visit for a person in a wheelchair. In order for a house to be visitable, it needs to include three basic design components: one, a zero-step entrance or ramp; two, wider doorways with at least 32 inches of clearance – Mr. Speaker, this means that the space between the door frame is at least 32 inches wide, not that the door itself is 32 inches wide – and, finally, that there is a main floor half bathroom. These are the minimum requirements needed for a person with a wheelchair to visit a house.

I'd like to establish clearly that Motion 505 is not urging any regulation or legislation change. The people of Alberta deserve and appreciate choice in the design of their residence. Any attempt to legislate a standard house design would be very heavy handed, which is not my intention in bringing this motion forward. Rather, I would propose the use of incentives to encourage people to look at the long-term benefits offered by visitable homes. To be clear, I am mindful of the economic climate in both Alberta and abroad, and I'm not proposing incentives with a significant financial impact to the province. Mr. Speaker, there is a history of using incentives to encourage building standards, including recent initiatives designed to promote energy efficiency. I would argue that the long-term benefits of implementing visitable housing warrant promotion of this idea.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to be clear that the intent of this motion is not to target existing homes. That said, we have funding programs to modify homes and provide support. These include the residential access modification program, or RAMP, for wheelchair users to increase accessibility in their homes as well as Alberta aids to daily living, providing financial assistance to Albertans with long-term disabilities or illnesses to buy medical equipment and supplies.

Returning to newly constructed homes, if a home is designed from the onset with visitability in mind, the cost is reasonable. Many of the changes required to meet a visitability standard are both affordable and, really, unnoticeable. Increasing the size of doorways, for example, is a seamless change that most would be hard-pressed to notice. Likewise, many homes already include a half or a full bathroom on the main level. In fact, walking into a visitable home should be no different than walking into any other home. While the appearance may not be any different, the long-term benefits can be quite astounding.

Mr. Speaker, the people of Alberta are aging. The baby boomer generation is nearing retirement, and as they age, their mobility can become limited. The simple reality is that many of the houses we live in today will be inaccessible to us in the future. I would reason that many of us in this House today can recall someone in their lives effectively losing a large section of their home simply because they were unable to access it.

Now, to be clear, visitable housing is not accessible housing. It is not a substitute for homes designed to accommodate everyone. However, visitable housing, by virtue of its three design principles, provides increased opportunities for those with mobility challenges to maintain contact with friends and families in their own homes. Also, during interim recovery periods for Albertans with injuries homes built with visitability standards allow for the increased possibility of recuperating in their home.

Mr. Speaker, the benefits of living in a visitable home are evident, and I believe that many people would choose to reside in this type of accommodation if given the choice. However, as a rela-

tively new concept visitability is largely unknown to both Albertans and the building community. I believe that by introducing incentives as proposed by Motion 505, we can promote this new form of housing design. This may in turn inform Albertans and get them to look for visitable characteristics when moving into or designing a new home. And if the people want something, the building community agrees and adapts. In fact, I believe that over time, once people start to see the benefits of visitable housing, we could eliminate any incentives and let the quality of this concept speak for itself. The key is simply to start the process.

I'd like to stress again that Motion 505 is not about legislative or regulatory change. It's not about telling people what kind of house they should live in or requiring that a home be accessible to all. Rather, Motion 505 is about encouraging a practical concept, a concept that has the potential to greatly assist our population as it ages. With visitability standards in place, not only will people with mobility concerns be able to visit friends and family, but as they age, they will also not lose the use of their home. I believe that Motion 505 is a practical initiative that does not overreach or unduly interfere in Albertans' lives. I also believe that it has the potential to improve our long-term quality of life.

With that, I'll conclude my remarks, and I look forward to hearing the comments of my colleagues on both sides of this House. Thank you.

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

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure to rise and speak in favour of this motion on visitability brought forward by my hon. colleague from Red Deer-South. This is truly an idea that I am supportive of, that many other people in the disabled community are very supportive of. In fact, many individuals in the seniors' community and other individuals are waking up to the idea that an accessible Alberta, an accessible future may incorporate changes such as we see in this act into everyday living situations here in Alberta.

If you look at the changes that are coming to the playing field here in Alberta, we have an aging population. We have more members who are reaching into their golden years, living longer, people who will be using accessible means of getting around. Whether that is wheelchairs, strollers, walkers, or what have you, these require more easily visitable sites, visitable whether they're a public building or a private residence. There is no difference. If a person with a disability or a senior with an adaptation to get into a home can't get in, that essentially keeps them out of the societal mix, which makes them less healthy, less vibrant. And those are things that government should be concerned about.

In my view, this motion sort of starts the education process as well as the incentive process to get Albertans and Alberta businesses providing this type of option available out there to people who are constructing a home, people who are constructing other developments that go forward. I see this as a beginning point for us here in Alberta to continue to go down.

5:10

Now, as I point to this as being one of the positive aspects coming out in the future, I look around, and this motion does bring up some things we could be doing better, in my view, here in Alberta. For instance, our building codes act is a pretty good act, but it lacks enforcement. You have a lot of things pertaining to disability or even visitability that are so far being unregulated, unchecked, not followed up on. So we have a lot of people who are unable, then, to get into buildings that are currently being constructed, that

should be done the correct way. These are concerns that are out there.

By no means is this motion, brought forward by my hon. colleague, a cure to those current things that are not right, not enforced, not holding Alberta out to be on a level playing field for those seeking a truly inclusive society. That said, a motion like this isn't supposed to rectify all of society's problems in one fell swoop, so I appreciate that. I just wanted to get those concerns on the record, that right now in Alberta there are many challenges with disabilities, whether that's aging, whether that's home care, whether that's accessibility to economic opportunities. Those challenges are out there, and they're massive, and at times I don't believe that the government takes them seriously.

That said, when I look at this motion in its totality and it being a private member's motion, it provides some of that rugged incrementalism you like to see out of our Legislatures. We're continuing to push the ball forward, continuing to open up our eyes to how a really inclusive community works. It doesn't work simply by having one house accessible. It works by having an entire community accessible, an entire city accessible, an entire province accessible. That's what the concept of visitability is working towards, a sort of entire society with inclusivity being the model, the goal, the norm, that people can live in a beautiful home that just simply allows for a difference of people to come through the front door.

I applaud the Member for Red Deer-South for it, and I would ask all members of this House to pass this motion. I think it's a good, forward piece of legislation, and I think that with the passing of this, we could see it incorporated into future acts and into future building codes and the like. But the work starts today. So if we keep remembering this stuff when we redo those things – "hey, didn't we pass something on this?" – then we can incorporate that into our future legislation.

I thank you for the opportunity to speak on this motion. Again, I'd urge all colleagues in this honourable House to speak in favour of it and, hopefully, to vote in favour of it.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to rise today and join discussion on Motion 505, which is being brought forward by the hon. Member for Red Deer-South. The objective of Motion 505 is to increase visitability and accessibility within Alberta's homes. Visitability is a key indicator when determining how easy it is for a person with confined or restricted mobility to visit or access a home. Visitability and universal access are two priority concerns for the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities. The members of the Premier's council, including the chairman of the council, Marlin Styner, are pleased that the MLA for Red Deer-South has sponsored this motion and look forward to the results.

Mr. Speaker, I wonder how many of us here in the Legislature would be able to welcome their friends and family members with restricted or limited mobility into their homes. Motion 505 proposes to increase visitability standards in Alberta's homes by introducing incentives that could encourage people to implement these standards when constructing new homes. Specifically, Motion 505 would increase visitability by encouraging three specific designs that include one zero-step entrance, wider doorways, meaning a minimum of 32-inch-clear door openings, and a main floor bathroom. These three factors are widely regarded as the minimum standards for creating a visitable home. These three

guidelines will ensure that everyone, regardless of mobility, will be able to at least visit a friend's home, use the washroom, and exit the home.

Mr. Speaker, as the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports I can tell you that Motion 505 could go a long way to making life easier for those with limited mobility. This can be especially relevant when looking at our province's aging population as has been mentioned by both previous speakers. Having newly constructed visitable homes fits in well with our department's directive.

In fact, our government already has the residential access modification program, known as RAMP. This truly is a very good program that helps promote greater accessibility. RAMP is a program available to eligible wheelchair users to modify their homes to be more wheelchair accessible. All wheelchair users within the program guidelines can apply for a RAMP grant of up to \$5,000. While I feel that the RAMP program is a great government initiative, I still think that more can be done to make our homes more visitable.

Looking at statistics, numbers show that visitable housing is needed now. We know that by 2030 the number of seniors in Canada over age 75 will grow by 277 per cent. That would bring the number of Canadians over age 75 up to 4 million from just 1.5 million in 1995. Mr. Speaker, it's safe to assume that many in this growing seniors' population will have mobility limitations.

While increasing visitable homes is sure to benefit a large segment of the senior population, it's important to look at how this motion could positively affect those with disabilities as well and, really, all members of our society, like mums with strollers, for example.

Our department's continuing care system also provides Albertans with the health, personal care, and accommodation services they need to support their independence and quality of life. Motion 505 will certainly help in this regard. The Alberta continuing care system provides both home living and supportive living facilities. Home living is for people who live in their own home, and supportive living combines accommodation services with other supports and care. In both cases it's easy to see how beneficial visitability standards would be.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I would like to highly commend the hon. Member for Red Deer-South for bringing this motion forward. Motion 505 proposes to increase visitability standards in Alberta's homes, and this is a key issue faced by many seniors and those with disabilities, which make up a large portion of my ministry's mandate.

I'm pleased to speak in support of Motion 505, and I urge all my hon. colleagues to do the same. Thank you.

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

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to stand up in support of Motion 505, "Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to utilize incentives to encourage," and it goes on. What I find very interesting in this particular motion is that it's urging the government to encourage the standards in all newly constructed single-family homes, as the member said, including one zero-step entrance, wider doorways, which is a 32-inch-clear door opening, and a main floor half bathroom.

What is interesting to me in this particular motion is that the government has the ability right now, without even listening to this particular motion, to make those standards available immediately. I mean, after all, they are the government. The seniors minister talked about the Premier's council, and she eloquently spoke about this as something that they've been after. I think that

if the government sees this as important as it is – I mean, they're the government. They can bring forward legislation. They can bring forward regulations. They can even bring forward a bill to make these changes immediately instead of going through this process of a motion. I'm struggling with that, Mr. Speaker.

5:20

What I am not struggling with is how quickly things have changed. Personally, I'm in the process of looking for new office space, and if you're going into new office space, there are regulations that have to be adhered to to deal with people with disabilities. That's wheelchair access, a wheelchair-accessible bathroom. If you are looking at an older space – and we're just starting to try and figure out what the rules are and what the regulations are because we weren't expecting to have to be moving out of my constituency office, but it's being gutted, and the whole mall is being renovated. What we're finding is that if we continue to stay in the mall we're in at this particular time, we have to have wheelchair accessibility. We have to have a wheelchair washroom, and it talks about wheelchair accessibility for getting into the building.

You move further into some of our older areas, and you don't need any of that. So you struggle with that fact if you're in a new building. It doesn't preclude the fact that I have constituents that come and see me that have disabilities. I'm thinking all of a sudden: how the heck do I have a constituent into one of the older buildings that I am in that can't even get into the office doors? It's a struggle.

The minister also talked about the aging population, and there's no question that we have to think ahead about some of the homes to deal with some of our aging population. I've spoken in this Assembly before about my mom currently being in an assisted living facility. You see at times where you've got a senior that's walking down the hall, and then, you know, several months later they're into a walker, and from there they go into a wheelchair. I know for a fact that if my – I'm blessed. My mom is still walking without a walker or even in a wheelchair at this point in time. If we went to where she had to go into a wheelchair, I'd be struggling in my own home as we were after she broke her hip in just dealing with her in her walker and getting up those stairs in the one-step level.

I guess it's like the Member for Calgary-Buffalo said: you really need to start working on this inclusiveness. You have to start looking ahead. I think what we have to do is start looking at the disabilities that are out there, how you accommodate. I think it's important.

I was somewhat taken aback, actually, listening to some of the conversation, that the builders now don't even have to adhere to, from what I understand, minimum standards when they're building a home. You can't particularly fault the builders, I don't think, at this particular time because they go by what the government tells them under the building code. What I think strikes me more than anything is the fact – and I stand to be corrected by any one of the government members – that if there is a building code, the government is responsible for that building code. I'm sure that they should be talking to the builders at this particular time, asking them to change the building code. It sometimes makes me wonder why we bring motions into the House when the government has the ability to be able to make these changes instantaneously, as far as I'm concerned, in regard to the changes that need to be done.

You know, we heard from the minister of seniors about the Premier's council, and I have a great deal of respect for the work that the Premier's council does. I think it was the former Minister of Justice that used to be the chair of the Premier's council, if I

may stand corrected, so it isn't something new to either the Minister of Justice or the minister of seniors. I would expect that if we started going through some of the council's former recommendations, that they have presented before the government, working with people with disabilities is something I know they've been advocating for many years.

I myself personally have learned so much by just watching the Member for Calgary-Buffalo. It amazes me what he has done in this Legislature and how he gets around. You know, he's in the Annex with us, and he goes like a bat out of hell from the Annex over to the Leg. I've kind of asked him if I could catch a ride with him sometimes. I think he has brought something to this Assembly in regard to what people with disabilities can do, and it's amazing how he just gets through here and by some sort of squeeze manages to get out of here. Huge admiration for what he does.

So we will support this motion. I think it's important. Again, I want to repeat that the government is the government. They have the ability to be able to make these changes very easily by bringing forward a change in the regulations or a change in the building code, for that matter. It's unfortunate that we have to have the Member for Red Deer-South bring it as a motion when he's in the government and could just go to the government and suggest that they make some changes with the code. I don't know if maybe there's some hesitation in regard to some conversations that have to go on with builders. I know he talks about an incentive, if I remember right. Yes. He does say: the government to utilize incentives to encourage standards within the builders. I think that's a great idea because I think most of the builders in this province – and I know several of them – I'm sure would be willing to do all of the things that are mentioned in this particular motion.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I want to say that it's a good motion. It's unfortunate that, you know, it hasn't been done through a government bill or regulations or through the building code. I have a great deal of respect for what he's trying to accomplish here, and I hope for that member that the motion passes.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm also pleased to rise today to say a few words and address Motion 505. This motion asks government to provide incentives to encourage visitability standards in the design of newly constructed single-family homes. While these are not the same standards under the Alberta building code, which are mandatory construction requirements, the spirit of this motion is admirable. Homes built with visitability features allow persons with disabilities to live in and visit these properties with greater ease and safety. As was indicated, these features include improvements such as wider doorways, entrances without steps, and accessible bathrooms.

Visitability standards in this motion speak to the broader principles of universal design, Mr. Speaker, designing products and environments that are usable by all people, including persons with disabilities. There's no doubt that as the population ages, barrier-free accessibility and universal design will become increasingly important. That's why Municipal Affairs is actively involved with the Premier's council for persons with disabilities. The department sits in a working group to promote universal design. In partnerships with key stakeholders the working group researches opportunities to promote universal design, whether by educational, financial, or other means. Through this work Alberta will become a model for best practices in universal design.

I need to emphasize that while a homeowner presently has a choice to use visitability designs, the Alberta building code requires accessibility in buildings especially used by the public.

These building code standards allow persons with disabilities to have safe access to public buildings, and over time, Mr. Speaker, we would hope that we would slowly move into residential homes.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I am speaking in favour of Motion 505 and thanking the Member for Red Deer-South for bringing forward this very forward-thinking idea. It's being framed as a motion, and I understand the reservations expressed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek in her preference for a bill as opposed to a motion because a bill would have greater weight, and the government has that opportunity through legislation to instead of talk about it actually begin to make things happen.

5:30

I want to talk about the circumstance of visitability from a very personal standpoint. Members of this House have frequently heard me brag about my father, Bryce Chase, whether it be his hunting prowess, whether it be his golfing capabilities. My father has been recognized, as I say, by a number of individuals. He'll be turning 88 on June 6. For example, the Member for Edmonton-Calder, who sat beside him at Alberta Fish and Game, commented on my father's vitality. I was very pleased when the Member for Red Deer-North, after I was talking about his Dieppe national golf winning experience when he was 85, sent me a note, and I passed those notes on to my father.

While I've spent a lot of time bragging about my father, I want to talk a little bit about my mother because it relates directly to visitability. Up until basically just about the mid-80s my mother and father would camp out at Little Elbow. They had a 10-mile circuit, and my mother would faithfully chug along at a pretty good rate with my father, and they would enjoy that circumstance. About five years ago my mother and father came out to Cataract Creek, where my wife and I were running the campground. Because my mother had been such a fit individual, I didn't stop to think about the effects of a fairly significant eight-kilometre roundabout hike in some fairly challenging terrain.

My father took the lead, and I was in the backup position for my mother, and together we managed to get her through a series of roots and rocks and obstacles. As we were coming back, I thought, "My God, I may have killed my mother" in terms of thinking that she could take on this kind of situation. At one point, when she was trudging up a fairly steep incline, I didn't have quite the support I should have had, and I called out to my father: here comes mother. Fortunately, he was ready and was able to catch her and support her.

As my mother's muscles started to atrophy, her home was no longer visitable. Her home no longer was accessible. My father tried a variety of circumstances to make it more visitable and accessible in terms of the standard procedures of the walker, but my mother, as well as her muscles atrophying, also was losing her balance ability. My father, to his credit, tried to overcome that by doing what I'd call the seniors' shuffle. There are many seniors who understand that shuffle. The more able senior reaches behind, puts their arms around his or her mate's waist, and basically sort of shuffles along behind, trying to keep them supported.

That allowed my mother probably an extra eight months in her house, but it got to the point that even with chairs that pushed her up and out and assisted her and my father, neither my father nor myself was able to negotiate either the two stairs at the back or the

walkway up the front. So the idea of visitable housing is to me a very progressive consideration.

Now, the hon. Member for Red Deer-South in putting forward this motion made it clear that he's not talking about legislated, regulated retrofits. He's not suggesting that people spend thousands of dollars to redo their house. What he is suggesting, although not necessarily directly, is the idea that when we purchase a house, we need to be thinking about how that house is going to suit our needs not only now but into the future. For example, the house my parents lived in was a bungalow, but even though it was a bungalow, there was still stairs access. In the case of the house that my wife and I live in in Calgary, it's a split level, so it wouldn't accommodate the requirements. There would be no first-floor bathroom, so visits from various friends are eliminated.

In the case of my mother, because of the accessibility, the visitability, she ended up in Cedars Villa, and all the family activities were then focused in one of the rooms in Cedars Villa, where we tried to accommodate. We brought in the food, we tried to make the circumstance as homey as possible, but the reality is that in an institution, no matter how friendly it is, you can't accommodate or parallel what you can in the comfort of your own home.

Mr. Speaker, I think the idea of suggesting that builders build homes with doors that are sufficiently wide to allow wheelchair access is extremely important. Obviously, people have the choice of what type of home they live in. If it's a two-storey home, that presents problems, but if there's a lower bathroom, so be it. People choose whether they live on hillsides, they choose whether they live in walkups, and we can't change that, but what we can do is suggest to builders that they take into account the needs of inclusivity to the greatest extent possible.

I commend the hon. Member for Red Deer-South for bringing forward Motion 505. As the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo suggested, for a society to be inclusive, we also have to be proactive.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased today to rise and join with my colleagues in the debate on Motion 505. I first want to congratulate the hon. Member for Red Deer-South for bringing this issue to the House and into the public ring. I am hopeful that our debate today will help to bring more public awareness to the issue of visitability standards, which is an issue that will affect more and more Albertans in the future.

As co-chair of the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities I am indeed very pleased that this motion will bring to the fore some very real and distinct challenges faced by many people across this province. It is extremely important that we look to the future in an effort to identify, examine, and rectify issues that are faced not just today but tomorrow as well. I want to discuss today what exactly the main components of visitability are, what makes them distinct, and why they are very important.

The concept of visitability is to make sure that single-family homes have minimal levels of accessibility so that wheelchair users and others who have mobility issues can visit those homes. There are three key design elements that make up the concept. They are, one, at least one zero-step entrance or ramp; two, wider interior doorways and minimum 32-inch clear door openings; and at least one bathroom on the main floor of the home.

Mr. Speaker, I want to share some of the things that I've learned about these three standards and how they are essential. Since I started looking into the concept of visitability, I've tried to take

note of some of these design elements when I'm out in my constituency. The first thing that I look at is whether a home has a zero-step entrance or a ramp. A zero-step entrance is a door that is at ground level and does not have any steps leading up to it. If a zero-step entrance is not possible, then a ramp could be added to allow an option for those that are not able to climb those stairs.

Now, I have noticed that many homes do not have zero-step entrances or a ramp. The lack of these features in some homes prevents people in wheelchairs or others who have restricted mobility from being able to visit these homes. These steps, which many of us barely notice, literally act as a barrier to many of our fellow Albertans. Putting a zero-step entrance or a ramp into a new home is not a large burden, Mr. Speaker. Homeowners would be able to incorporate these features into any entrance to their home, and these components are not very expensive. Also, by offering tax incentives, homeowners could recoup the costs.

5:40

Now, once you have someone that is in a wheelchair in your home through a zero-step entrance or ramp, they need to be able to manoeuvre through the home freely. There are many different types of wheelchairs and power scooters that aid people with their mobility. Ensuring that they can move through the door is critical so that they are not restricted to one room.

This is where the second concept comes into play, which is ensuring a wider interior doorway with a minimum 32-inch opening. These wider door openings allow wheelchair users to move freely, which not only is more convenient but also safer. Making sure that the door's width could accommodate a wheelchair allows those people to be able to evacuate a home using the quickest and safest route.

As I was reading about this, I found out that a 32-inch door opening is not much wider than most standard doors found in homes today. The standards would make sure that the designs of new homes would not have to be drastically altered to allow the extra-wide door. It seems to me that this would be a subtle change, but the effect would be very positive.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, the third component of visitability is to have at least one bathroom on the main floor of the house. Wheelchairs, obviously, can't climb stairs, so ensuring that those who use them can use the washroom is not only practical but essential.

Mr. Speaker, I am very grateful to the hon. Member for Red Deer-South for bringing this motion here today. One purpose of having these debates is so that we can educate each other and Albertans about this issue in this province. I do not think that this subject is widely discussed in the public, and I'm happy that we can hopefully bring it to the attention of more Albertans.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise this evening and to speak to Motion 505.

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to utilize incentives to encourage visitability standards in all newly constructed single-family homes, including one zero-step entrance, wider doorways (minimum 32-inch clear door opening), and a main floor half bathroom.

There are more and more individuals in our society that are wheelchair bound. I had the opportunity last Friday to actually go over to the Canadian Paraplegic Association, and I signed up to be in a wheelchair for a day. I think perhaps one of the most important things for a society is to be aware of others and to understand the challenges that others have. Again, when I was over at the Canadian Paraplegic Association, we talked about, you

know, those barriers and the challenges and how to get around and all those things, and I think we've come a long way in our society about how we're addressing accessibility for those people that are in a wheelchair.

When I was in that wheelchair, one of the first things I said when we were having our early morning session to discuss a little bit about what we were doing and why we were there was for us to be grateful that we have the mobility of our legs versus those people that don't.

Mr. Speaker, I too, like the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, want to become a little bit personal at this time. My mother is in a wheelchair, and she struggles in that wheelchair. When I built my home, I wanted it wheelchair accessible. I built wider hallways. I built wider doors. I actually put in 36-inch doors. Thirty-two is accessible, but it's kind of nice to have a little bit of extra room. Yes, it did cost a few extra dollars, but to this day I do not regret it.

So often when we want to pass legislation or do things, we don't always understand: what's the domino effect? One of the things that really frustrated me is that I wanted my zero threshold to come from my garage into my house because my mother has a van. She can drive in. She can get out the ramp in her van, much like the ramp that the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo has, and then drive right into my home. But the regulations were such that because of carbon monoxide they want the garage lower than the door going into a house so that if there is a vehicle running or whatever, it drifts lower and doesn't drift into the house. It's always amazing how even when we want to do something, when we're made aware, often we're told that we can't do it.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity also talked about split-level homes. There are just many areas that when we don't really think about it, we don't realize the implications when we pass such standards. As much as I want the visitability – I support this in the fact that we're just urging – I don't think we should just be urging government. We should be urging, you know, builders. We should be urging citizens to become more aware, just as we have on many other subjects in the past. It's about education. It's about that awareness and what we're doing with it.

Another area that frustrated me. My grandmother passed away at the age of 93. She had moved into a seniors facility for the last two years, and I was astounded when I'd go and visit her there at the number of times that the one elevator they had in that facility was broken. This was a new facility down in southern Alberta, but the struggle that they had and my fear for her having to go down the stairs to go to eat because of how many times the elevator was out of order.

I know that we passed legislation for seniors facilities and also for those public facilities, and we continue to work on it. But the real struggle that we have is that we're not aware yet, whether it's engineers, designers, all those other ones, and don't realize how easily we can adopt these things when we're doing the building of a new facility, a new place.

I also remember, Mr. Speaker, going to one of the early debates for the mayors of Calgary, and my hon. colleague from Calgary-Buffalo wasn't able to participate in that because it was in a public facility that was not accessible for him. There's no question that we definitely struggle and have problems with accessibility for those people in a wheelchair. It is discouraging when you have a loved one in a wheelchair who cannot participate or go to a function because when you check, you find out that it's not wheelchair accessible. All of a sudden: oh, why did we fail to check that before we booked this place for a family or for a public forum that we find isn't accessible for those people in wheelchairs?

It is interesting that they've got just three points in here. We want the wide door. Like I say, I've struggled over the years to get

my mother into various friends' homes with narrow 28-inch doors. You clip your fingers when you're trying to push them through, and you do damage on them. The zero threshold is probably the biggest barrier that you run into most frequently, this area where you just can't get over and the struggle and the danger when you try to push these individuals through and hit the bumps and try to lift and the door is narrow.

The intent of this motion is a great one. It's something that I think all of us as Members of the Legislative Assembly should be more aware of. I would urge all members that if they have not participated in a wheelchair-for-a-day event, they should seriously look at that for next year, go to the local Canadian Paraplegic Association and say: what can I do so that I'm more aware and understand the challenges of people in a wheelchair? We need to be more considerate. We need to be more mindful, and that usually happens when we're more aware of those individuals. I think that as elected members of this House we are pretty aware. I especially remember the hon. member Weslyn Mather, who was another wonderful example of someone who just made a great effort and did not let the wheelchair inhibit her ability to work for her constituents and to be a wonderful advocate of those people in that same situation.

Mr. Speaker, it is important that we're more aware of those people that have physical disabilities and are stuck in a chair. We need to be more aware of it. I think that it's by talking, by having these debates that we can and will become more aware. You know, when we lay concrete in these new communities, that we have curb cuts. I remember going back 20, 30 years, it was a rare occasion. Even though they might have had a wheelchair facility inside a building, you'd park the vehicle and there was no curb cut simply to get into the parking lot. Now we're aware of those things. We have the legislation. So awareness and education really is what it's all about.

5:50

Like I say, I'd really continue to urge all members to take up the challenge of the Canadian Paraplegic Association and try a wheelchair for a day. You'll be amazed. Even such simple things as going up to a door and realizing the challenge of opening a door, that it exists. Then if you have that little threshold in there, it can really be a challenge if that door swings shut on you. Such things as even getting into the elevator: is it large enough that you can back in? Can you turn around? There are just so many areas that, if we're thinking about them, if we're aware of them, are easy to overcome. But if we're not aware of it, all of a sudden we've created a barrier for those people who can't participate, though they might dearly want to.

I applaud the Member for Red Deer-South and his motion. Like I say, it's always good to bring these motions to the floor so that we can debate, become more aware. It'll be interesting to see if the government actually grabs hold of this and moves forward or not. The government is in a situation that caucus could easily make this a bill. This could have been bill 21 if that's what the government wanted to do, yet it hasn't been brought forward.

I've never been in the government, so I don't understand your priorities or why some bills go forward and other ones don't. This one, like I say, has a lot more to offer many Albertans than such bills as Bill 50. In saying that, "Well, we don't know if you have to have a zero threshold for a door, but you do have to have \$16 billion in power lines because we know better," it seems like sometimes we get our priorities mixed up in here and want to spend a lot of taxpayers' money for the benefit of everyone but the taxpayers.

This one, I think, the intent is good. The motion is good. I understand it. Like I say, we do want that freedom for people to

realize that when they're building a home, they can make that conscious decision and be made aware, and we'll go from there.

I thank you very much for the time and look forward to any other points that are brought up on this motion.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I realize that time is late getting to the voting. I did want to offer just a couple of comments here as well. I think this motion is a good idea, and I think that it's good that we have this type of conversation. I want to thank the sponsor of this motion.

Just before I get into a couple of comments, I don't think anybody here really fully understands what it's like in a wheelchair. The Member for Calgary-Glenmore mentioned about being in a wheelchair for a day. Well, maybe a lot of us, including myself, should consider that next year. At the same time the Member for Calgary-*Buffalo* understands because he lives that every day. I also look to people in my own family who do understand, like my aging grandfather as well as my aunt who passed away last year who had her mobility issues.

We want to imagine how difficult it must be for people who have limited mobility to get around on a daily basis. I'm not just talking about moving from point A to point B; I'm referring also to in their own private homes. There can be a particular issue in a lot of housing codes. As I've travelled this province, I've actually seen over and over how expensive it can be to retrofit some of these homes. In fact, it doesn't actually cost a significant amount of money to look at widening doors in some of our places, as simple as that, or having a more barrier-free design in some of our new homes. I've been to some places we have with our affordable housing programs, Mr. Speaker, where we have actually been able to change lives very positively for individuals who may suffer from disabilities. Again, it doesn't cost a lot when you actually go and plan it, but when you go and retrofit it, it can cost a significant amount of money.

With accessible housing people can access most of the necessities within a home, including a kitchen, bathroom, and bedroom. While we're quite familiar with the term "accessibility," that's not necessarily the case when you have the term "visitability." I'll just touch on that briefly. Visitability is an indication of how easy it is for a person with confined or restricted mobility to visit a home that is in fact not their residence. I put it to you, Mr. Speaker, that sometimes we take this for granted every day. It's a concept which seeks to provide single-family homes with a bare minimum level of accessibility so that a wheelchair user can feel comfortable within a home.

I do think that this is something that we need to discuss. This is a motion that I will be supporting. If we look at a bill, though, we

also have to look at the cost and balance the cost to the benefit because at the end of the day it all is passed on to the consumer. We also want to look at not inordinately affecting consumers when it comes to a bill like this. It does warrant some further discussion, and I'm hoping in the future that we can see some more specifics in a bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs, but Standing Order 8(3) provides for up to five minutes for the sponsor of a motion other than a government motion to close debate.

I'd invite the hon. Member for Red Deer-South to close debate on Motion 505.

Mr. Dallas: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and offer a couple of closing comments on Motion 505. I thank all of the members for their contribution to the debate this afternoon.

I introduced this motion because I believe that it has the potential to help people with decreased or limited mobility interact more fully with their community. Obviously, the discussion here today and the discussion that I hope ensues, creating awareness for all Albertans about the value to our families, to our friends, to our neighbours in terms of the prospect of making our homes more visitable, I think has some great upside. I also think that while there's been some comments about the cost of this and whether we should regulate it or legislate it, we need to think in terms of the context of if we can get Albertans talking about and seeing the value of making these homes more accessible, there's actually a resale value or a return on investment that potentially Albertans can receive for making these investments. If you look at our aging population and the demand for what these homes can offer, there's a great deal of upside there as well, Mr. Speaker.

It may not be a well-known concept in our province or, in fact, in our country, but I think it's a trend that is on the move and a trend that we'll want to be discussing with all of our colleagues going forward, how we can help support this concept moving forward.

I appreciate all of the comments and the debate today, and I ask that all members provide their support to this motion. Thank you.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 505 carried]

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

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that the Assembly now stand adjourned until 7:30 this evening.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:57 p.m.]

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