

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Thursday, May 11, 2006

1:30 p.m.

Date: 06/05/11

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Let us keep ever mindful of the special and unique opportunity we have to work for our constituents and our province, and in that work let us find strength and wisdom. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Government Services.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On your behalf I'd like to introduce to you and through you 22 home-schoolers from Neerlandia in the constituency of Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock. They are accompanied this afternoon by Joy Wierenga, Beatrice Tiemstra, Ina Hofstede, John Wierenga, and John Harink. They are seated in the gallery this afternoon. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment.

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly Madeleine Jacobi, who is the Athabasca Rotary exchange student from Sweden. Her parents, Lars and Ann-Mari, are also here. They are accompanied by the host parents, Dan and Lorna Dennis. They are seated in the members' gallery. I'd like them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Renner: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to once again introduce to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly probably one of the most faithful school groups that we have visiting the Legislature. Crestwood school has visited our Legislature every year of the 13 that I've been an MLA, and I know that they had a tradition long before I was elected. Although they may not have the most visits, I would venture to say that if a hardship factor was put in place for whoever drove the most kilometres, at a thousand kilometres per round trip, this group has put in well over 20,000 kilometres coming to visit us here at the Legislature. They are seated in both the members' gallery and the public gallery. I would like to introduce to you two grade 6 classes from Crestwood elementary school accompanied by principal Mr. David George, vice-principal Al Tisnic, teachers Maria Thompson, Wade Lawson, Wendy Smid, Gary Ziel, and Kathy Western, also parent helpers Shawn Carry, Darren Pederson, and Sandy Noble. I would ask that they all rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of all Members of the Legislative Assembly.

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

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This afternoon I have two introductions. First, I'm honoured to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly the Alberta War Brides Association. This year, 2006, is the Year of the War Bride, marking the

60th anniversary of the war brides' arrival in Canada. In 1946 nearly 40,000 war brides and their children landed at Pier 21 in Halifax, Nova Scotia, from Britain and Europe on board special war bride ships. Organized and funded by the federal Department of National Defence, the war bride phenomenon is unique in immigration history. From Halifax they fanned out across Canada on many war bride trains. Perhaps just as compelling a story is the war brides' collective experience of meeting and falling in love with Canadian servicemen abroad. I have in my own family an example of that. My aunt met an Australian serviceman and actually was a war bride to Australia.

With us today are 12 war brides accompanied by their aides and loved ones, led by Mrs. Jeanne Pfannmuller, who is the social convenor for the Edmonton chapter of the Alberta War Brides Association. A number of the brides were unable to join us today due to illness and influenza. Those with us today are Jean Bruce, Josephine Campbell, June Dorn, Renda Grumetza accompanied by her daughter Rhonas Grumetza, Heather Heninger, Kit Kelly, Margery Paige accompanied by her daughter Arlene Kozuback, Edna Squarok, Sybil VanSickle, who is president of the Alberta War Brides Association Edmonton chapter, Olive Wadson, and Hetty Wear accompanied by her daughter Eileen Wear. I'd ask that our honoured visitors please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

I'm also pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly family members and friends of one of our pages, Jennifer Huygen. Seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker, is Susan Huygen, proud mother of Jennifer. Accompanying her are Nicole Huygen, Jennifer's younger sister; and Thomas L'Abbe and Lacey Suen, both friends of Jennifer's. Susan, Nicole, and Jennifer live in the constituency of Edmonton-Whitemud. I think it's only appropriate to take a moment to say, when her mother and sister are here, how proud we are of Jennifer and of all our pages and the great work that they do for us in this Assembly. What fine young people they are. I thank the Assembly for the traditional warm welcome for our guests.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour today for me to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly, on behalf of the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright, 35 people from the special town of Wainwright. They are here today with their teachers Mrs. Michelle Folk, Mr. Sheldon Gallagher, and Ms Janet Kaye and parent helpers Mrs. Jean Watson, Mrs. Cheryl Heier, Mr. Denis Mailloux, and Mrs. Dawn Worthington. I would ask them all to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two sets of introductions today. First of all, it's a privilege to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly Mel and Joan Teghtmeyer. Mel and Joan are two of Alberta's most committed and persistent activists. They're very interested in alternative ways of decision-making at the government level. They're calling for open and accountable government, ethical leadership, corporate responsibility. Believe me, they pursue those interests with passion and intelligence. They're seated in the public gallery. I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of all members of the Assembly.

My other introduction, Mr. Speaker, is Miss Jill Piebiak, my constituency office's summer STEP student. She'll be entering her

third year of political science at the U of A in the fall. Not surprisingly, she has a keen interest in Alberta and Canadian history and politics and hopes to continue studying these areas as a postgraduate student. She spends volunteer time with the United Church youth of Canada, leading many of their provincial events. I know that she is going to be a real asset to my office in Edmonton-Riverview. I welcome her on board and ask all members here to please give her a warm welcome.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Meagan Hazlewood, our summer STEP student, back for a second year. She is taking interior design at NAIT and did a number of wonderful graphics last year for the Queen's visit. She is involved with the youth part of the party, attending our convention in June. Would she please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:40

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

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great honour to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly six wonderful people. They are Ajaib Singh Cheema from England, Mukhtiar Singh Dosanjh, Jaswinder Singh Dosanjh, Surjit Singh Dosanjh, Raghbir Khubar, Sharnjit Dosanjh. They are here this afternoon to tour the Legislature. They are seated in the public gallery. I'd request them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very honoured today to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly some of the many wonderful mothers of our caucus and constituency staff. Today we celebrated Mother's Day at a luncheon as a way of thanking our mothers for their wisdom, their love, their generosity, and most of all their support. We all recognize that our mothers have helped build this great province through their hard work and commitment to our communities. I would therefore now ask that each of them rise as I call out their names: Louise Hicks-LaChapelle, mother of administration assistant Alison Crawford; Aruna Sharma, mother of outreach coordinator Anand Sharma; Leah Andruchow, mother-in-law of communications director Tina Faiz and mother of Rob Andruchow; Sharon Flanagan Dubé, mother of Marieke Dubé, sessional research assistant; Angela Andreychuk, mother of constituency assistant Kris Andreychuk; Herta Schymizek, mother of chief of staff Sherry McKibben; Sylvia Flood; Bettianne Hayward, grandmother of STEP assistant Beth Hayward; and Marion Eggen, mother of the Member for Edmonton-Calder. I would ask that they all rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm truly delighted and honoured to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly a very special guest today, John Kolkman. John has been caucus research director over the little more than nine years that I have

spent in this Assembly and as part of the NDP caucus. John also served, I understand, between 1989 and 1993, when my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview was the Leader of the Official Opposition. Unfortunately for us, John will be leaving to pursue other opportunities and endeavours. I want to take this opportunity to offer my special thanks to John for the most valued advice, wise counsel, and sometimes firm reminders over the years about not doing this or doing that. I would now ask John to please rise to receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It certainly gives me great privilege and pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the Members of the Legislative Assembly Gary Horan. Gary is a staunch and long-time Progressive Conservative Party member, who previously served as the president of the Alberta Alliance Party and gave up this position to return to the PC Party of Alberta and subsequently ran for Senator-in-waiting in Alberta. Gary is presently working with me. I would ask Gary to stand and receive the warm welcome of the Legislative Assembly.

head:

Oral Question Period

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

Confidentiality of Ministerial Briefing Notes

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This Conservative government has long, long been known for its secrecy. In 2004 it won the code of silence award from the Canadian Association of Journalists for being the most secretive government in Canada. Now government legislation threatens to even further restrict the freedom of information process by withholding ministerial briefings for five years, an amendment even the Privacy Commissioner is opposed to. It's the Premier's legacy of government: silence. My questions are in fact to the Premier. Given that a review conducted by an all-party legislative committee in 2002 made 62 recommendations, none of which included restricting ministerial briefings, will the Premier admit that this amendment is aimed at further protecting government ministers from public scrutiny?

Mr. Klein: No, Mr. Speaker, I won't admit that. It's to protect this book. There is no way in the world that you or you or you or anyone over there is going to get this book.

You know, there was an ND – he was a very good ND; he was a critic – John McInnis. He has since passed away, Mr. Speaker, so I can mention his name. One day down in the gym he said: would you just pass along to me your briefing book? And I said: sure. Then Vance MacNichol, who was my deputy at that time, said: did you really promise John McInnis that he could have your briefing book? He said: “Do you understand that in this briefing book there is very sensitive advice to the minister” – I was Minister of Environment at that time – “very sensitive advice that the opposition would love to get their hands on? They would love to get their hands on it.”

Mr. Speaker, this is sensitive and confidential advice to a minister or the Premier, and it will remain that way.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the taxpayers have paid for that book to be prepared, what secrets are in it that the public should not be informed of?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I would remind all Albertans that they are getting paid to do nothing more than criticize the government.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: is the creation of a more restricted, secretive freedom of information process really the legacy that this Premier wants to leave the people of Alberta?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I want to leave a legacy of good government. That's the only legacy I want to leave. But I also want to make sure that ministers are protected relative to the advice they receive from senior government officials.

Now, when the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition worked for the government, he was very careful about providing advice to the minister. But then after he found out that the minister didn't accept his advice, he quit and wrote a book. And he's entitled to do that. [interjections] I'll tell you what, he can give it to the NDs.

This information, Mr. Speaker, is confidential now under the existing rules and will remain confidential.

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

Budget Process

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A report released yesterday by one of the Premier's favourite think tanks, the Parkland Institute, has confirmed what opposition parties and political observers have long known: that this Tory government treats public revenues like a partisan piggy bank; that the public, media, and opposition representatives are shut out of the budgeting process; and, most importantly, that the Tory government has no coherent plan to take advantage of Alberta's remarkable resources. It is time for a change. My question to the Premier: in the wake of this damning report, will the Premier at least go on record and recommend what the Alberta Liberals have long been committed to; namely, an end to the PC-only budget process, that shuts out the views of a majority of Albertans?

Mr. Klein: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm always happy to receive the advice of a left-wing think tank. The report was entitled Fiscal Surplus, Democratic Deficit.

1:50

Mr. MacDonald: Does anyone work for a right-wing think tank?

Mr. Klein: The right-wing think tanks, in answer to his question, are at least more accurate in their predictions.

If the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition would turn to pages 100 and 101 of the government's fiscal plan – and this is a public document – you will see a list of private-sector forecasts for oil and gas. At the bottom of each of these pages you will also see how well these private organizations did at predicting oil and gas prices. Mr. Speaker, I would put my stock in the private-sector predictors instead of the Parkland Institute any day.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: will the Premier commit, as I am prepared to commit, to creating an all-party committee of the Legislature to conduct public hearings on Alberta's budgetary process?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, we have gone through a series of public hearings on all kinds of revenue/surplus situations: It's Your Future, Water for Life, the Roundtable on Family Violence and Bullying, A Learning Alberta: Dialogue and Direction. The list of public consultations goes on and on.

I have to explain, Mr. Speaker. This is not a top-down government, unlike the Liberals, who want to control everything. They want to control the lives and the minds of all Albertans, but we give Albertans credit for being able to think for themselves, unlike the Liberals and the NDs.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you. Again to the Premier: will the Premier join the Alberta Liberals in a commitment to increasing the mandate and authority of the Legislature's Public Accounts Committee, much like its federal counterpart, in order to increase legislative oversight of government spending?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, the Public Accounts Committee, which is chaired by an opposition member, can ask any questions they want of any minister. Believe me, I go through it. My ministers go through it. Nothing relates – nothing relates to the issue at hand, which is the expenditures of the last year. They go all over the place. In other words, they should bring their fishing rods because they're on a fishing trip.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Lottery-funded Grant Presentation Cheques

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This Tory government continues to blur the line between nonpartisan government and partisan Conservatives. Lottery money is Albertans' money, not Conservatives' money. Yesterday in Public Accounts, in response to the Member for Calgary-Varsity the Gaming minister put an end to the Tory MLAs signing novelty cheques for photo ops in their constituencies.* I have only two questions, the first one to the Minister of Community Development. Now that the Gaming minister has banned partisan cheque presentations in his department, will the minister follow the lead with the cheque presentation for Wild Rose and other lottery foundations?

Mr. Ducharme: Mr. Speaker, on many occasions as the MLA for Bonnyville-Cold Lake I've had the opportunity to meet with various groups that have applied for different grants in terms of being able to provide some good services and venues for Albertans to use into the future. It's symbolic when a cheque goes forward, in terms of a photo op, to show that the community has worked hard in terms of raising their funds. I think it's just part of the process in terms of acknowledging the hard work that volunteers in Alberta have done.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question is to the Premier. In that backbench Tory MLAs have on at least two occasions given out novelty cheques with their signatures on them for expansion of seniors' centres, will the Premier put an end to this practice?

Mr. Klein: Well, Mr. Speaker, no, I won't put an end to that practice. The CFEP grants are available to members of the opposi-

*See p. 1521, right col., para. 8

tion, as they are to government members. I'm sure that the hon. member benefits to a great extent in his own constituency from CFEP grants and all the community facilities that are built in his constituency by those grants.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party, followed by the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Health Care Privatization

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Albertans should heave another sigh of relief that the Conservative government has decided not to even bother introducing its third-way lite legislation this spring. The problem is that this government always wants to go down the failed road of delisting, user fees, and further privatization. The result of these dead-end approaches has been a complete paralysis on the part of the government when it comes to health care policy. My question is to the Premier. Will the Premier admit that the dead end of privatization has resulted in a paralysis of the government when it comes to health care policy? And will he admit and will he tell the House what we all know, and that is that no third-way legislation will be introduced in this session at all despite the minister's promise that that would happen?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, the health care debate will never come to an end, not as long as health care costs continue to rise at the rate of over 9 per cent per year. The only solution that has been offered by the NDs, by the way, is to throw more money at it. They think that the money just falls from the sky. You know, we're already up to \$10 billion, and they say: oh, well, just throw more money at it.

Mr. Speaker, speaking of throwing money at things, I was listening yesterday to the radio, and I heard the hon. leader of the third party advertising: no way to the third way. Well, why would they be spending money on ads that are totally and absolutely redundant?

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker, but as long as this Premier is still around, we're not going to rest.

Will the Premier admit that privatization of health care is a political and policy dead end, and will he commit himself to going down the direction of public health care?

Mr. Klein: No. No, I won't admit that, and I won't admit that Canada should be the same as only two or maybe three other jurisdictions. I don't know about Albania, but I do know about Cuba and North Korea. There has to be a better way. If the hon. member has a better way, send it over.

Mr. Mason: We're still waiting for the government's better way, Mr. Speaker.

Will the Premier commit as his legacy to improving public health care in this province through innovation and just good ideas within the public system?

Mr. Klein: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's easy for the hon. member to say "good ideas." He had one idea, and we're working on that nationally. That's a national drug program. We're looking at reducing administrative costs, understanding that about 75 per cent of costs are wrapped up in salaries, many of them union salaries supported by the NDs.

Mr. Speaker, we're trying to find innovative ways to address this very serious problem. Obviously, through their misinformation and their campaign of misinformation we were forced to withdraw some contentious components of the third way, the result of their misinformation.

2:00

I'll give you an example of the misinformation that they're promoting, that people glom onto. A fellow wrote a letter to the editor of one of the Calgary papers. It was a Mr. Huck. He wrote about Granny breaking her hip. He implied in his letter to the editor that Granny would have to pay \$50,000 to have her hip repaired. Well, if she fell and broke her hip, she would be treated immediately. If she went to a doctor and the doctor said, "Well, it's not an emergency, so you might have to wait three or four years or a year and a half," but it was causing her pain, then she would have the option of waiting for that hip replacement in the public system or buying insurance or paying out of her pocket, Mr. Speaker.

But it was absolutely wrong and false to say that Granny would have to wait if she fell and broke her hip. That is the kind of misinformation that the NDs were spreading.

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

Municipal Financing

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question today is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Given the urgent need for municipalities to fund critical infrastructure projects and in light of the fact that the provincial government has already taken an important first step in establishing the Alberta municipal infrastructure fund to address the infrastructure backlog, will the minister consider a longer term, sustainable solution to provide municipalities in Alberta with the financial resources to handle their responsibilities?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member brings to the attention of the House something that's very near and dear to the hearts of municipalities throughout the province. He points out that the \$3 billion commitment that this province made to municipalities to deal with infrastructure is a five-year commitment. Municipalities need a long-term, sustainable source of funding if they're going to continue to maintain their infrastructure and catch up on some of the backlog.

Ever since I became minister, I have been engaged in discussion with municipalities on how we're going to establish that long-term, sustainable source of funding. As I've mentioned before in the House, Mr. Speaker, at present I'm engaged with the minister's council, which is representatives of various municipal organizations in the province, to define what the roles and responsibilities of municipalities are, and then we will get into the long-term, sustainable source of funding to deal with those roles and responsibilities.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you Mr. Minister. Based on negotiating these defined sets of roles and responsibilities between the municipalities and the province, would the province consider vacating the \$1.45 billion of education property tax while at the same time balancing this by decreasing grants to the municipalities?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, that's one of the options that the council is in fact considering. Is it feasible? Is it possible for the province to find an alternate way to fund education, leaving some tax room, in essence, for municipalities? Those are the issues that can be more fully discussed once we've got the agreement on what the roles and responsibilities are.

I think it's important that at the end of the day there needs to be a win-win-win. Simply transferring tax revenue from one pocket and one level of government to another level of the government isn't really seen by the taxpayer as being particularly beneficial. So we also have to figure out a way in this formula that the taxpayer can have some direct benefit as well.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and Mr. Minister. My last question is: will you consider and commit to bringing forward in the next year a strategic plan to coincide with budget planning to identify how and when the province will vacate the property taxes and allow municipal governments to plan for their infrastructure needs for the upcoming future?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I've asked the minister's council to be completed their work by this fall. The reason for that is that it then will allow their recommendations to be incorporated into our fiscal planning. I cannot commit that this particular option will be the one that we go forward with, but certainly what I will commit to is that once the minister's council has finalized and put their work together, we will make every effort to implement that plan as expeditiously as possible.

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

Healthy Living Initiative

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Premier announced that the universities of Alberta, Calgary, and Lethbridge have initiated an innovative partnership to promote healthy lifestyles and prevent disease. The pan-Alberta public health coalition is designed to focus on healthy living programs to reduce obesity, manage chronic conditions, and train more public health officers. This project has the potential to greatly increase the health of Albertans but only if it receives the necessary support. My questions are to the Premier. Given that health promotion is exactly what we need to do to reduce costs and ensure sustainability in our health care system, what is the government's reasoning for not funding this initiative?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, this is an initiative of the three universities. I had the opportunity to attend yesterday at the University of Alberta. There was a video link to the U of C, and the president of the U of L was there in person. There was no mention whatsoever by Indira Samarasekera of the University of Alberta and no mention by Harvey Weingarten of the University of Calgary, nor was there mention by Bill Cade, the president of the University of Lethbridge, of any funding for this particular issue. Now, if they submit a business case to the Minister of Advanced Education, I'm sure it will be taken under advisement.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Again to the Premier: well, given that the former Deputy Minister of Health, currently the interim dean of

the U of A School of Public Health, one of the partners in this project, has stated that \$20 million is needed for Edmonton, why was his recommendation ignored?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, Roger Palmer was there as well, and indeed he acted as the master of ceremonies. That is the person to whom the hon. member alludes. He didn't mention to me any need for any cash at all. As I say, if they want to present us with a business case, we'll take it under consideration.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Again to the Premier: given that this government chose to reduce funding for the tobacco reduction strategy and has abdicated from funding hot lunch programs for schools, is the Premier adding this initiative to the growing list of examples of this government saying one thing and doing another?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I believe that we fulfill our commitment to a healthy lifestyle by actions. I don't see any members of the Liberal caucus in the gym. I'm there every day. But I see them at Martini's, you know, supping on steak sandwiches. Some people see them at Martini's, not me. I don't go there; I just hear that they're there and the NDs as well. Oh, I see one in the gym, that being the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder. I see him from time to time, but I don't see any Liberals ever in the gym, and I work out every day. I do my five kilometres; I feel better for it.

You know, Mr. Speaker, there is a comment – the hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations said once to a reporter, "Boy, I had my workout, and I feel really good." The reporter responded: "Yeah. I went to Martini's. I had a steak sandwich and a couple of beers, and I feel good too."

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

2:10

Electricity Billing

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Constituents of mine are concerned with the practice of electricity retailers using estimated meter readings for billing purposes. They are concerned that when estimates are used, they are usually based on consumption that is higher than actual usage. One constituent compared this inaccuracy to a 30-day loan to the energy marketer. My question is to the Minister of Energy. Changes to the regulated rate option come into effect in July 2006 and could result in energy rates fluctuating monthly. How can consumers be assured that billing errors resulting from incorrect estimates will be corrected based on the appropriate energy rate?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member is correct that last year there were some policy changes in respect to how the regulated rate option was designed. Those continue to be implemented over the next number of years. July 1 of this year is the first stage of implementation.

One of the other things that's happened in companion to that is that the Energy and Utilities Board has put a tariff billing code in place that will also come into effect in July of this year. That will bring out some very precise practices that will be required for both estimated and actual billings. So that should address the particular question that he's raised.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the same minister. Will these new invoices provide enough clarity that consumers will understand how these corrections are calculated?

Mr. Melchin: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know, when it comes to electricity, as with all industries it is really quite complicated in detail, but to bring it down to a simpler understanding for the public, there are two primary elements on a bill. One is for energy usage. The other is for the delivery charges. There are obviously some more details related to each of those components. What will happen is that there will be a requirement that the rates that will be prevalent for that month for an estimation, those estimated amounts will be charged at the appropriate rate for consumption during that month, and then it will be adjusted when the actual reading is done on a bi-monthly basis.

Mr. Lindsay: My second supplemental to the same minister: for the purposes of clarity and accuracy will the minister make the necessary changes to ensure that bills for electricity are based on actual meter readings?

Mr. Melchin: Optimally, Mr. Speaker, it would be great if all billings could be based on actuals every month. The challenge for that is a cost question for everybody, too. So the practice is that every other month there's an actual reading. It is a tremendous cost to go out to read those meters and record that information on a monthly basis. It would actually add additional cost, that people would pay in the long run, than having it done on a bi-monthly basis. So it's in balancing that that it was decided that for the most practical and cost-efficient means every other month would be sufficient.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Kindergarten Programs

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Early childhood education has been abandoned in the '06-07 budget. We all know that early intervention gives children a greater chance of succeeding in school and life. The Education minister knows this by his past statements in the House. Will the Education minister answer his own questions from 1999 when he was sitting as a Liberal member? My question to the Minister of Education: given that the minister asked for sufficient support for a "fair and even head start in learning," why won't he fund these programs across the province today?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to tell you that since I've been sent over to the government side by my constituents, we have put \$241 million toward this particular initiative.

Mr. Flaherty: Well, Mr. Speaker, is the minister prepared to undertake a review of the early childhood education program, which was a critical "priority" item for him in 1999?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, it still is a priority, and it always has been a priority. The simple fact is that all we're saying is that we're not making it mandatory. We're not forcing it onto jurisdictions. We have locally elected school board trustees for a reason. We have them there to make local decisions. Not every part of this province wants a forced kindergarten program. Not every part of this

province wants a forced program for 4-year-olds in a pre-kindergarten either, but for those who wish to provide it, we help them with the funding.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the level of support that the current Education minister had for early childhood education, can he explain why full-day and junior kindergarten remain unfunded in the '06-07 budget? Can he explain to us why not?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, you know, they've got to get better researchers. They just have to. They used to have them. I can attest to that. It's either that or the member doesn't understand how numbers work at all.

We do have program funding to help with both junior K and K in those jurisdictions who wish to provide those programs, and they provide them, some of them on a weekly basis, some of them on a part-time basis, every second day, or whatever. If he looks even with his own eyeglasses into the budget in '06-07, he'll see that the money is there.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Workers' Compensation Board Dividends

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I understand that the WCB has realized an exceptional return on their investments over the most current reporting period. My question today is for the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. Will the minister share with the House exactly what the WCB plans to do with these windfall funds?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That's a very good question. I believe that workers' compensation is very, very important to Alberta with a hot, booming economy under a good government. What Workers' Compensation does is very important. The policy of Workers' Compensation is to issue dividends to employers in certain circumstances. The reason employers received a dividend is because the funds invested came from monies paid by the employers. Of course, the guiding principle of the Workers' Compensation funding policy is to ensure that there is always sufficient money to continue operating the program from year to year because the economy could change, revenues could change. Although health and safety is not a legislated mandate for Workers' Compensation, they are also directed that portions of the money go towards safety programs.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental to the same minister: do all employers receive a share of this return on investment made by the WCB, and does the WCB place any restrictions on where employers can spend this money that they received from this dividend?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That's another very good question. This process, I guess, is basically a reward for good practices and good safety programs. All employers receive a

share of the dividend unless they have a history of poor health and safety programs with the Workers' Compensation Board, they pay a premium of less than \$100, they did not complete their annual returns, or they are in arrears in their payments. The employers are free – and that's the main part of the question – to spend the dividend money wherever they want, but we encourage them to reinvest in other work safety programs.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental to the same minister: in light of this, how do Alberta's WCB rates compare with other jurisdictions?

Mr. Cardinal: Mr. Speaker, we are the best in the universe. We're definitely the best in North America and in Canada. The rates, of course, are the lowest anywhere in Canada. More good news on Friday, I believe. Stay tuned.

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

Ethics in Government

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As executive director of the electricity unit at Alberta's Department of Energy, Kellan Fluckiger has undertaken a number of policy initiatives that have proven to be of financial benefit to AltaLink, the province's largest transmission company. Kellan Fluckiger's spouse is AltaLink's senior vice-president of regulatory and client services. Now, the province's code of conduct and ethics for public servants states that employees are in conflict of interest and in violation of this Code if they:

- (a) take part in a decision in the course of carrying out their duties, knowing that the decision might further a private interest of the employee, their spouse or minor child.

The Minister of Energy confirmed that the government is aware of Mr. Fluckiger's circumstances but has failed, in my opinion, to clear this matter with the Ethics Commissioner. My first question is to the minister. Given that the Department of Energy has suspended the bidding process for transmission projects, the majority of which will now be assigned to AltaLink, how is Kellan Fluckiger not in conflict of the province's code of conduct and ethics for public servants?

2:20

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to first set the record straight with respect to Mr. Fluckiger, who continues to be mischaracterized in what has happened. From day one, before any contracts were put forward, the Ethics Commissioner – all of those things were reviewed as to his circumstance and certainly understood and approved. So this has all been vetted. It's made sure that it has been public and transparent. Therefore, in that case that first duty has been met.

Secondly, with respect to assigning of building of transmission lines, it's the Energy and Utilities Board and AESO, Alberta Electric System Operator, that go through the needs and application and assign it to the transmission facility operator in the area.

So it isn't anything to do with our department that makes that question and no conflict in particular to Mr. Fluckiger.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: given that the Department of Energy has intervened in an Energy and Utilities Board, EUB, hearing to actively support a \$339

million expansion by AltaLink, how is Kellan Fluckiger not in conflict of the province's code of conduct and ethics for public servants?

Mr. Melchin: In this case, first off, the assignment was made by both the Alberta Electric System Operator and Alberta Energy and Utilities Board as to AltaLink being assigned to develop this line. It is in the department's interest and Albertans' interest, which we support, after it has been developed through these other boards to ensure that we have the transmission capacity in line to get electricity reliably, predictably, and on time to all of us when we need it. Therefore, it is incumbent upon our department to represent why it is the urgent need of the citizens of Alberta to see that transmission capacity is built not just in that one corridor but in a number of places where there is high growth in this province.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: given that the Department of Energy has exempted companies such as AltaLink from the generic rate of return that is imposed on other regulated utilities, how is Mr. Kellan Fluckiger not in conflict with the province's code of conduct and ethics for the public servants?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, first off, that decision as to rates of return or not on transmission is fully regulated, always has been regulated, and it goes through those appropriate bodies. The independent Alberta Energy and Utilities Board sets and approves and adjudicates those questions. It has nothing to do with the Department of Energy, not myself, not the deputy minister, not in this case Mr. Fluckiger in his capacity.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Coal-bed Methane Drilling

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The impact that coal-bed methane development is having on our land and water far outweighs the modest volumes of gas being produced. The jury is very much out as to whether the societal benefits of trying to mine natural gas from coal seams is worth the environmental and health trade-offs that it presents. The jury is also out whether the Conservative embrace of the recommendations will have an effect on anything besides PR spin. My questions are to the Minister of Environment. Why does this minister think that the thousands of residents who are meeting in community halls throughout the province in central Alberta are wrong when they say that there's too much coal-bed methane activity on their land?

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you. I think – and I'm sure the hon. member agrees – that it's incumbent upon all of us to deal with fact. As much as all of us can go to a Tim Hortons and determine opinions on certain things – and I'm very pleased to say that the multistakeholder group that was very forward-thinking said: we are going to base our decisions on fact, on science-based research. Now, that's what we're doing effective May 1. In other words, before anyone can determine if they can get an EUB licence, they have to satisfy Alberta Environment as a regulator. They have to do the baseline testing. That is a recommendation, and it is the law. What that baseline testing means is that it will take the opinion and we will formulate it into what the science says. I do think – and I'm sure

that the hon. member agrees: don't you think that it is very responsible for us to be using science and facts to make our decisions? That's exactly what the recommendations are, and that's why we acted on them well before they even have become public.

Mr. Eggen: Well, the hon. member has a lot of convincing to do to residents in central Alberta.

I would like to ask him: why is the protection of air, land, and water once again playing second fiddle to the bottom lines of energy companies wanting to profit from the exploitation of coal-bed methane?

Mr. Boutilier: Hon. member, there is some uncertainty out there by residents of what it is when someone goes around – I don't say this to, actually, the New Democrats, but I know that the Liberal Environment critic has been out there fearmongering relative to what is all wrong, and that is wrong. The reason why I say it's wrong: I thought the hon. member and all Albertans agree that we want to do what is right to in fact protect our water. We're taking that action, but to take a group of people with no knowledge at all and start fearmongering to them is irresponsible and wrong, and we will never do that. What we will do is deal with facts, science-based facts. In actual fact, Mr. Speaker, that's exactly what we're doing because it is our duty to Albertans.

The Speaker: Hon. member, just so the House knows, there was a point of order raised in the last exchange, and we'll deal with it at the conclusion of the Routine debate.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe that there are many legitimate complaints from central Alberta farmers and residents that do deserve something more than the empty rhetoric that is being presented here.

Why doesn't the government at least put a moratorium on drilling into the water-saturated Mannville formations until such time as the negative environmental and health impacts identified by the multistakeholder advisory committee are fully addressed? Instead, why are you giving them royalty rates to encourage them to drill there?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, we are not. Let me be very clear. That is not accurate or not true what the member just said. Let me even be further; let me be very further. If after our science, which we are doing and conducting now, when a licence is issued, six months is incumbent – by the way, industry are paying a hundred per cent of the science and the facts. In fact, if it is determined not by the fearmongering and all of the opinion that some others are promoting out there but based on fact – I want to assure this Assembly and all Albertans that if, based on science-based fact, there is someone's well that is being impacted negatively by coal-bed methane, I will shut down that well. That's my commitment to Albertans. But as of yet there is absolutely zero science-based fact to support such action at this time.

Mr. Melchin: I'd just like to comment on one thing with respect to royalties in particular. This multistakeholder advisory committee did actually have a recommendation about the Mannville zone to give royalty changes or structures. We did not accept that recommendation as a government. Today we put that out in public. That is not a recommendation that's been accepted by the government. In fact, it's been discarded.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Farm Safety

Mr. Marz: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. May is a very busy month in the farming community. It's also the month of the year that most accidents take place on the farm. Last year there were 1,353 farm-related injuries as well as 17 fatalities in Alberta. Of course, one is too many, but 17 is shocking. My question is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. What is the minister doing to address this situation?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, agree with the hon. member that one fatality is too many and that 17 is indeed unacceptable. On average, 18 people are killed each year in farm-related incidents on Alberta farms. That's a terrible statistic and even more terrible is that it's wholly preventable. There are many practices that farmers and ranchers can follow to make sure that their farm is a safe place to work and also to recreate. For example, farmers are urged to take a little extra time to ensure that all their machinery is running properly, that all the guards are in the appropriate places, that all the safety mechanisms are working and in good working order.

Farms are unique in that they are work sites, they're homes, and they're places where families live, work, and play, so they can't be treated the same way as a construction site. The approach has to be a little bit different. We are working closely with rural communities and industry groups to increase the awareness of farm safety issues. We're providing information through resources like Ropin' the Web, the website, like some of the other education forums that we have. We're also working with workplace health and safety and the medical examiners' offices to gather information on these accidents and these hazards and then getting that information back out into our farming communities. So really, Mr. Speaker, what we're doing is an education program. We're trying to make sure that farmers have the right information about what is safe practice and what are some of the issues that they should be aware of on-farm so that we don't have this number of fatalities.

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: these programs are fine if they work. Could the minister tell me how effective these programs actually are? Are the rates going up, or are they going down?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We, of course, would like to see the rate go down to zero. It's very difficult to measure that kind of success because we don't really keep an accurate assessment of whether or not the education format is penetrating to the actual farmer on the ground. As well, there are so many other factors that come into each individual accident. Is it because of weather-related incidents, where the farmer might have been hurrying to get something done on-farm? Farm stress is another factor which we're seeing a lot of these days because of the crisis in our grains and oilseeds sector. We do believe that the message is getting through, Mr. Speaker. We believe that because of the calls that we're receiving in our call centres because of the information

that we're putting out there and the number of interactions that we have now on farm safety.

The other issue that I believe is very, very important, Mr. Speaker, is our education in the schools because if we educate the young farmers, they will have that knowledge as they go in and become professionals.

Mr. Marz: Given that many of the accidents involve livestock and your statistics show that 38 per cent of those involve horses, could the minister tell me how many of these horse-related accidents are actually on-farm accidents, or do they include competitive sports such as racing and rodeo events?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Farm-related injuries and fatalities are reported on a voluntary basis by the health regions. Many times while we're aware of what happened, we're not always aware of what activity was taking place at the time the accident happened. We don't have any official way of tracking whether the incident occurred while the person was engaged in a competitive or a recreational aspect or whether it was a farm-productivity activity, in other words working on the farm, so we don't always know if the injury or accident occurred when the person might have been out horseback riding or actually involved in a rodeo. Nevertheless, no matter what activity they are participating in, individuals should be aware that they're dealing with animals who can be unpredictable. There are a number of potential dangers when dealing with livestock, and the best way to deal with that is to ensure that you have the knowledge that you need to have when you're dealing with livestock. We have a lot of resources available to producers: Ropin' the Web, our call centre, and a number of others.

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

Work Camp Standards

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our big work camps in the oil sands do not allow conjugal visits. Families are discouraged from visiting much less staying with their mothers, fathers, husbands, and wives. Family recreation is nonexistent. Twenty-four days on, four days off becomes standard for many workers: big bucks, no life. It is no wonder that the divorce rate is 80 per cent for some trades after a couple of years on a camp job. It is no wonder that some oil sands projects are having trouble attracting and retaining workers. My question is to the minister of human resources. Will the minister enact basic oil sands work camp employment standards to allow for conjugal visits and work to allow and encourage family contact for oil sands workers?

Mr. Cardinal: Mr. Speaker, you know, that's a very good question. It must be hard to be a Liberal opposition and wake up in Alberta and try to find something wrong with the province. In an issue like that, of course, there are a number of collective agreements between unions and employers, and you can be assured that our government does not interfere between the unions that negotiate with employers. We also do not interfere with private companies that take contracts with these companies or individuals that work with these companies. I believe that it's an individual issue that should be left that way, not get the government involved in the process.

Mr. Backs: It's camp design, actually.

To the same minister, Mr. Speaker: to retain more workers in Alberta and cut social costs, will the minister's department work to

encourage improved camp standards to have, for example, at least a toilet and a shower with each room?

Mr. Cardinal: Well, Mr. Speaker, there again, if the Liberals were the government – thank God they're not, and they probably never will be. Issues like that: I have confidence in the union leaders; I have confidence in the private contractors. They do provide top-quality services, probably the best in the universe.

Mr. Backs: To the same minister, Mr. Speaker: will the minister encourage the big oil interests that it is in their interest to limit unsafe, overly long work schedules and encourage family-friendly hours of work?

Mr. Cardinal: There again, Mr. Speaker, this government will not get involved in the day-to-day administration of work projects in Fort McMurray or any other area.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we have the hon. Minister of Gaming wishing to supplement an answer given earlier in the question period.

The hon. minister.

Lottery-funded Grant Presentation Cheques

(continued)

Mr. Graydon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to supplement the answers given to a question from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, who questioned the Premier and the Minister of Community Development regarding presentation cheques. What I stated at Public Accounts yesterday was that the practice of MLAs having their signatures – their signatures – on the lottery-funded grant presentation cheques was inappropriate, not the practice of having presentation cheques presented on the minister's behalf at community functions. The lottery-funded presentation cheques should only have the signatures of the Premier and the Minister of Gaming on them.*

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie may ask another question if he chooses.

Mr. Agnihotri: Mr. Speaker, my question was to stop this practice.

Another thing I want to ask, through you, is why the opposition members don't get the opportunity. [interjections] Just a minute. Let me finish. We are also elected representatives. People elect us too. This is Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member has raised his question. The question has been clearly identified.

Mr. Graydon: I would encourage the hon. member opposite to check the websites of the members of his caucus, and he might be surprised at one of the pictures that he sees on that website of this very offending policy that he claims.

Vignettes from the Assembly's History

The Speaker: Hon. members, shortly we'll call upon the first of six hon. members, but today we'll continue with our historical vignettes. Today a number of random comments on a variety of election-related subjects from Alberta's first 100 years of democracy.

In the 1905 general election Albertans voted using coloured pencils. Voters selected the coloured pencil corresponding to the

*See p. 1515, right col., para. 8

candidate for whom they wished to vote, then marked a coloured X on the blank ballot paper. If current members in 2006 conclude from time to time that the House may get carried away with lawmaking and the writing of regulation, let me quote from page 299 of the North-West Territories ordinances of 1905.

The pencils used under the provisions of sections 26 to 53 inclusive of this Ordinance shall be of colour as follows in each electoral district: If there are two candidates the colours shall be blue and red; if three, yellow shall be added; if four, black shall be added; if five, brown shall be added; if six, green shall be added; and if there are more than six, such additional colours of pencils shall be provided as the Lieutenant Governor may direct. The handle of each pencil shall be of wood and shall be not less than six inches in length and of sufficient thickness to enable the name of any candidate to be placed upon one side in characters not less than three-eighths of an inch in depth. The wood of the pencil should be painted the same colour as that of the marking material it contains, which shall be inserted securely in the handle so that it cannot be removed.

The Alberta Election Act governed the election process for the first time in the 1909 election, less than a month after the Act was proclaimed, and it thus deemed the ordinances unnecessary.

2:40

I might then jump a long way forward in the history of Alberta. The office of the Chief Electoral Officer was created in 1977 under the Election Amendment Act, and this office oversaw its first provincial election in 1979.

Members may wish to know as well that in 1905 the deposit required to file nomination papers was \$100. In 1993, 88 years later, it was doubled to \$200, and in 2004 the deposit was increased to \$500.

For elections in Alberta March and June are the favourite months, with each hosting seven elections. August has held five, November has held three, May has seen two, and April and July have each experienced one. In Alberta a general election has never been held in January, February, September, October or December.

head: **Members' Statements**

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

Tribute to Cicely Elizabeth Truman

Ms Haley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Even before our current version of Mother's Day, there were days honouring mothers. In ancient Greece, Rhea, the mother of gods, was paid tribute, and in the 1600s in England there was an annual observance called Mothering Sunday. In 1914 President Woodrow Wilson proclaimed that Mother's Day become a national observance. Canada adopted the same day to celebrate mothers.

As Sunday is Mother's Day, I would like to tell you about my mom, one of four daughters born to Thomas and Cicely Lauder. My grandparents immigrated to Canada from Scotland and England, settling in a small farming community in Saskatchewan following the First World War. My mom was one of those rare children that did so well with her school work that she was recommended by her teachers to not write finals in high school.

My dad, like so many good Alberta boys, found a wife in Saskatchewan and promptly brought her back to Alberta, where they embarked on a life filled with adventure in the oil patch. By adventure I mean no power, no phones, no TV, no running water, no grocery store within 20 miles, and usually on a back bladed road. Sometimes the only way in or out was to be pulled in behind a D3 Cat.

As hard as it was, I do not remember thinking that life was hard. It was always just a challenge or an opportunity. I'd like to thank my mom for that attitude because, no matter where we were, she always made it our home. The best days were getting off the school bus and smelling fresh bread baking or seeing the sheets freshly washed and completely frozen on the clothesline, mom and the family black lab looking out the window to make sure both my brother and I were home safe. Summer was always fun. We picked blueberries, strawberries, and the inevitable bouquet of Alberta wild roses mixed with bluebells for my mom.

I'd like to thank my mom for teaching me about the little things in life that make it good and the wisdom that she passed down, including "If you can't say anything nice, Carol, don't say anything at all" or "Carol, if you make that face again, it will freeze like that forever" and my all-time favourite, "If everyone is going to jump off that cliff, are you going to jump off it, too, Carol?"

For all that and a million other things, to my mom and my friend, Cicely Elizabeth Truman, thank you, Mom, and happy Mother's Day.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Foothills-Rocky View.

Canadian Federation of Independent Business

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to recognize an important 35th anniversary today. Nineteen seventy-one was a good year for the friends of free enterprise and prosperity. Nineteen seventy-one was the year of the formation of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, known to most of us as the CFIB. For 35 years the CFIB has been giving small firms a big voice in the public affairs of Canada.

Many of my constituents in Foothills-Rocky View are members of the CFIB. Many of the colleagues within this Legislature, past and present, are also members. Over 105,000 independent business members are with the CFIB and wholeheartedly support the federation's mandate of promoting and protecting Canada's free-enterprise system. Almost 10,000 members are from right here in Alberta. These 10,000 members in Alberta are pillars of their communities. They spearhead innovation, they create real opportunities, especially for our youth, and they're the drivers of our economy.

I know I speak for many of my colleagues today when I say that we appreciate the input from the CFIB on the issues of the day. CFIB keeps its fingers on the pulse of small business in Canada. It helps to relay to us where the members stand on the issues before us. We might not always agree on the best method of solving these issues, but we share the common goals of making Alberta the best place in the world to live, work, and raise our families.

Mr. Speaker, my own work in the Regulatory Review Secretariat has given me a new appreciation of the efforts of the CFIB. The federation recently did a report on burdensome government regulation and presented copies of this report to myself and the Minister of Restructuring and Government Efficiency. This report is tough but fair. We've discussed the report with the CFIB, and I look forward to continued co-operation with the CFIB as we move forward on this important initiative.

This is just one example of how we can work with the CFIB to ensure that Alberta has the most effective and efficient regulatory environment in Canada, and I certainly look forward to strong relations with the CFIB in the future. Congratulations on your anniversary.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Lloydminster Super Cities Walk for MS

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise this afternoon in recognition of the Super Cities Walk for MS, a walk which took place in the beautiful city of Lloydminster and included people from the surrounding area as well as my home town of Vermilion.

On April 29, Mr. Speaker, not only did I have the privilege of attending the eighth annual MS walk, I attempted the 10 K walk. I soon realized that five K was more my style, and after two blisters and a small rash, I realized that “K” meant “killer.” But I digress. It was a wonderful morning to spend in the beautiful Bud Miller park with over 260 walkers.

For the year of 2006 the goal of the MS Society of Canada Lloydminster branch was to raise \$80,000. I have been informed that not only are the pledges still coming in but already the Lloydminster branch has surpassed both last year’s funds of \$73,000 and their intended goal of \$80,000 for this year. To date the pledges officially turned in by the walkers are now over \$87,000. That’s an increase of more than \$13,000 over last year. In fact, the staff at Wal-Mart raised \$5,000 themselves, which was matched by the Wal-Mart head office. So we’re \$10,000 from Wal-Mart, Mr. Speaker.

For the sake of all people who have been so affected by this disease, the fundraising will continue, and one day soon we can only hope and pray that the ultimate cure for multiple sclerosis will be found. To all the Lloydminster walkers, to the volunteers, and to the sponsors: for a job well done congratulations on a truly special event.

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

Democratic Renewal

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I am continuing my series on the need for democratic renewal in this province.

In the Speech from the Throne this Progressive Conservative government talks about wanting to be more open and transparent, but are words followed by action? Is this government serious about transparency and accountability? The answer is no, as is evident in one particular piece of legislation that is before us in this Assembly; namely, the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Amendment Act, 2006, better known as Bill 20. The amendments contained in Bill 20, Mr. Speaker, are half good, half bad. The good part is the extra protection against foreign-based agencies or organizations obtaining access to Albertans’ personal information, as what’s in the USA PATRIOT Act to give an example. Also, there will be bigger fines for contravening the act, which is definitely positive, and I support.

Now, what don’t I like about Bill 20? It attempts to add new layers of secrecy to a government that is already labelled as the most secretive and least open in the country. Ministerial briefing notes similar to the ones which led to the federal Gomery inquiry will be sealed from access for five years. Even the Privacy Commissioner himself opposes this change. Chief internal auditor investigations will become off limits for a whopping 15 years. That’s like four elections or four governments, Mr. Speaker. The 30-day processing time limit on FOIP applications will now be removed, so a request can stay pending indefinitely while the Privacy Commissioner is considering whether it ought to be dismissed or not.

Even the federal government in Ottawa, regardless of which party is in power, is strides ahead in terms of openness and access to information. Our provincial Tories, however, do not respect the people’s democratic right to ask questions or seek answers. They think they’re above scrutiny. Access to information requests are

now processed from the angle of “How can we deny, restrict, or delay access?” not “How do we co-operate with the applicant?” It is also clear that government staff have been instructed to communicate verbally wherever possible or choose their words very carefully just in case they’re FOIPed one day. Consultants are increasingly receiving compensation for verbal advice with nothing to show for it on paper.

I will repeat myself today, Mr. Speaker: those who have nothing to hide, hide nothing. Thank you.

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

2:50 Support for the Book Publishing Industry

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I would like to speak about the importance of Alberta’s book publishers. This industry has been starved by the government for years, forcing some businesses to relocate to other parts of this country. Just last year, Mr. Speaker, the Red Deer Press was forced to sell out to a larger Ontario-based company in order to stay afloat. This should not be happening.

Alberta book publishers help in attracting and keeping talented people in this province. Book publishers help to create literary work and foster talent that feeds other Alberta cultural industries, such as film, theatre, and magazines. They generate employment stability and provide a creative avenue for local writers to show off their talents. However, a lack of provincial support in Alberta has put our book publishers at a significant competitive disadvantage.

The Book Publishers Association of Alberta has developed a plan that would assist this province’s publishers greatly. The Alberta publishers’ fund, as suggested by the association, would ensure the stability and growth of an important cultural industry in this province, but it requires government support.

We discover who we are as individuals and as Albertans through our arts and culture. I urge this government to acknowledge the value of our book publishers and to work with the Book Publishers Association of Alberta to keep these important businesses in this province.

Thank you.

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

John Kolkman

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It’s my pleasure to recognize today John Kolkman for his contributions to the Alberta NDP opposition caucus in the nine years since April 1997 that he’s been with us. John was invited to join the NDP caucus by then leader Pam Barrett. John came to the caucus with considerable experience in the nonprofit sector as an administrator, a researcher, and a community builder. He was an active citizen in his neighbourhood of McCauley, where, amongst other activities, he was part of the group that developed Edmonton’s first community health centre to serve inner-city residents.

Prior to joining the caucus, he was assistant director at the Mennonite Centre for Newcomers, where he worked tirelessly to assist the diverse immigrant community to establish themselves in the community. From this and other experiences John developed deep-rooted interests in human rights, good governance, and government policy.

During his tenure with the caucus his primary role was as caucus researcher, and as such he developed an encyclopedic knowledge of government policies, finances, and legislative matters. He has used this prodigious knowledge to benefit the New Democrat opposition

as we actively pursue quality of life issues for Albertans. John has also been the chief of staff on a number of occasions, fulfilling this vital caucus role when the position was otherwise vacant. In this capacity he worked to create a stable, productive work environment. I want to mention that John has a tremendous capacity for work and a very, very strong work ethic, Mr. Speaker.

He has a wonderful family as well. He's married to Kate Quinn, who's the executive director of the Prostitution Awareness and Action Foundation of Edmonton. He has two young-adult sons, David and Brendan. John Kolkman is a person of vision, dedication, and compassion, and he supports various nonprofit organizations and other causes promoting human rights, social justice, diversity, and peace.

On behalf of the caucus I wish John and his family the best of everything. We are indeed grateful for his outstanding contribution to our caucus, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Might I also point out to all members that today is the birthday of the hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

head: **Presenting Reports by
Standing and Special Committees**

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

Mrs. Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Select Special Chief Electoral Officer Search Committee I'd like to table the committee's report recommending the appointment of Mr. Lorne R. Gibson as the Chief Electoral Officer for the province of Alberta. Thank you.

head: **Notices of Motions**

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to give notice today that on Monday pursuant to Standing Order 34(2)(a) I will move that written questions appearing on the Order Paper do stand and retain their places with the exception of written questions 17 through 28 and 30, 31, and 32.

I'm also giving notice that on Monday, May 15, I will move that motions for returns appearing on the Order Paper do stand and retain their places with the exception of motions for returns 27 through 35.

Mr. Speaker, I also wish to give oral notice today of two time allocation motions which will apply to Bill 20, the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Amendment Act, 2006, which, as we all know, comes under the primary jurisdiction of Government Services, sponsored by the hon. Member for Red Deer-North. This is the first time we have found it necessary to use time allocation in this House since 2003. In fact, during the past five years our government has used time allocation only six times. I will table the exact figures for reference in this regard very shortly.

With that brief background, Mr. Speaker, I hereby give oral notice of the following two motions. Number one:

Be it resolved that when further consideration of Bill 20, Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Amendment Act, 2006, is resumed, not more than two hours shall be allotted to any further consideration of the bill at Committee of the Whole, at which time every question necessary for the disposal of this stage of the bill shall be put forthwith.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to the second oral notice, I think it's valuable to just quickly remind the House that we've already had about six hours of debate on Bill 20 so far, and we have also debated at some considerable length 10 amendments proposed by the

opposition with respect to Bill 20, so this next motion and the one just given will bring us to a total of approximately 10 hours of solid debate on this particular bill. Therefore, I will give oral notice now of the second motion. Number two:

Be it resolved that when an adjourned debate on third reading of Bill 20, Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Amendment Act, 2006, is resumed, not more than one hour shall be allotted to any further consideration at this stage of the bill, at which time every question necessary for the disposal of this stage of the bill shall be put forthwith.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: **Introduction of Bills**

**Bill 42
Appropriation Act, 2006**

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to introduce and would beg leave to introduce Bill 42, the Appropriation Act, 2006. This being a money bill, His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having being informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, as you know, and I know that all of the members of the House know, the Appropriation Act provides voted spending authority to the ministries for operations of the Legislative Assembly and government for this fiscal year. Expense and inventory/equipment purchases are about \$27 billion, capital investment about \$1.2 billion, nonbudgetary disbursements \$172 million, and lottery fund initiatives \$1.3 billion, as well as the \$75 million for the expenses of the Leg. Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 42 read a first time]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

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

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today and table the appropriate number of copies of the 2003-04 and 2004-05 Child and Youth Advocate annual reports. We value the role the advocate plays making sure that the voices of children are heard.

Mr. Speaker, I'm also pleased to table copies of two documents outlining the action Children's Services has already taken to address the issues in these reports. All of the issues have been addressed through various program ministries, services, or legislation.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table a letter from a Paul Armstrong of Edmonton. He was quite upset by the response he received from the Minister of Advanced Education in regard to his concerns about Bill 40 and the undemocratic process the minister is establishing for tuition policy. Mr. Armstrong says the minister's response showed a "lack of consultation with the taxpayers."

Thanks.

3:00

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two documents to table today. Both are exchanges between the Minister of Advanced Education and two concerned Albertans, Shannon Phillips of Lethbridge and Lou Arab of Edmonton. Both asked us to table what Ms Phillips called a dismissive response from the Minister of

Advanced Education to concerns that Bill 40 will reduce democracy and transparency in tuition policies. In both cases the minister tells the correspondents that “those who have not been there done that would not be expected to know” about the processes involved in passing orders in council and that Bill 40 “would avoid wasting energy on matters that are not a problem.” Both correspondents claim that they’ve been there and know what’s going on.

Thank you.

head: **Tablings to the Clerk**

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Cardinal, Minister of Human Resources and Employment, pursuant to the Regulated Forestry Profession Act the College of Alberta Professional Forest Technologists 2005 Annual Report.

head: **Projected Government Business**

The Speaker: The Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Under Standing Order 7(5) I would ask the Government House Leader to share with us the projected government business for next week, the week commencing May 15.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, hon. member and Mr. Speaker. On Monday, May 15, in the afternoon under Introduction of Bills we will deal with Bill 43, the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2006, and then there will be private members’ business, Written Questions, Motions for Returns, as explained earlier, and other private members bills, should there be any. As part of that under Committee of the Whole and assuming that there will be time we will deal with Bill 207, Traffic Safety (Driver Disqualification and Seizure of Vehicles Arising From Drug Offences) Amendment Act, 2006, and Bill 208, Protection of Fundamental Freedoms (Marriage) Statutes Amendment Act, 2006. On Monday evening from 8 to 9 we’ll deal with private members’ motions, presumably 511, and at 9 under government business we should be able to do second readings on bills 42, 40, at least, and otherwise as per the Order Paper.

On Tuesday afternoon we should be able to deal with second reading of Bill 43 and Committee of the Whole for bills 42, 40, 43, and 20 and possibly some third readings as well as per the Order Paper. On Tuesday evening, May 16, we should be able to deal with Committee of the Whole for bills 42, 40, 43, and 20 and third readings for bills 10, 14, 28, and 32, and otherwise as per the Order Paper.

On Wednesday afternoon we should be able to do third readings on bills 42, 40, 43, and 20, and otherwise as per the Order Paper. On Wednesday evening, May 17, we should be able to do third readings on bills 42, 40, 43, and 20, and otherwise as per the Order Paper.

On Thursday afternoon we anticipate dealing with, of course, question period and the spring sitting adjournment motion and also any other bills as per the Order Paper that may be necessary to be dealt with at that time.

The Speaker: Hon. members, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**
(reversion)

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I actually rise with a heavy heart to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly persons who earlier today bravely shared heartbreaking stories about their families in continuing care. Anna Pavolich* is an RN who feels that the system bullies, is dishonest, and is run with unqualified staff. Marjorie Starr, Charlotte Helbak, and Merla Poulette,* who were here earlier but had to leave to get to the International Airport, have a mother who is helpless, aged, and had been sexually assaulted in a long-term care facility. Theresa Sawchuk* and Cheryl Doucette’s* father’s leg is being amputated as we speak. Their contention is that the care of his leg was neglected and therefore this amputation was necessary. Darryl T. Adams’* father choked to death. Beverly and Gary Heddington’s* mother died of dehydration despite having a feeding tube in place. Robert Warden’s mother died in care, and a public inquiry will take place. I would ask these brave people to rise and be recognized by this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre on a point of order.

Point of Order
Allegations against Members

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I give you the citations 23(h), making “allegations against another member”; 23(i), imputing “false or unavowed motives to another member”; and (j), using “abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder.”

The situation was that during question period the Minister of Environment referred to actions of the Member for Calgary-Mountain View, who is also the opposition critic for the environment, as fearmongering, and he repeated this a number of times. I have checked the definition of fearmongering, and it says – well, a monger actually to be specific – a person promoting something considered contemptible. I would argue that the member was promoting public health, promoting community consultation, and promoting research on water. I would argue that those are not contemptible actions.

The Member for Calgary-Mountain View draws on his background as a public health official, as a medical doctor, and, specific to this issue, from his direct dealings with Albertans. He’s brought the claims of Albertans to this minister and to the House. In that the primary source of Calgary-Mountain View’s concerns were those of Albertans, I’m disappointed that the minister would disparage the concerns of Albertans as fearmongering. I argue that the minister may not like what the Member for Calgary-Mountain View has to say along with the community activists that have worked with him, but that is no cause to impute motives or to make allegations that he is somehow involved in something contemptible.

I will also quote as a citation *Beauchesne* 484(3) in which it cautions that members “will not be permitted by the Speaker . . . to impute to any Member or Members unworthy motives for their actions in a particular case.” Clearly, under the provisions of 23(j) language like fearmongering is likely to create disorder and certainly promote additional debate, which is unwanted during the exchanges in question period. So I argue that there is a definitive point of order against the Minister of Environment for the use of those words, and I would ask that he would do the right thing and withdraw them in regard to the actions of the Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

*These spellings could not be verified at the time of publication.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, we don't have the benefit of the Blues at hand, so there's no way of verifying or not what the accusations are that were just presented by the previous speaker from Edmonton-Centre; however, I will anxiously await the arrival of those Blues so that we can have a look at it.

3:10

I want to point out a couple of other things, though, with respect to the issue of the word or words "fearmongering". I've looked into *Beauchesne* to see what in the past has typically been ruled unparliamentary, Mr. Speaker. I would just remind the House that under *Beauchesne* 489, where it cites, "Since 1958, it has been ruled unparliamentary to use the following expressions" – and then it goes through and lists copious quantities of words and phrases – nowhere can I immediately see fearmongering, nor can I see the use of the word "mongering" either. Similarly, when I look at *Beauchesne* 490, which also deals with expressions that have been deemed parliamentary or not parliamentary – in this particular case it says "ruled parliamentary to use [them]" – I don't see any specific reference allowing the usage either. So I'm at a loss to comment on what may or may not be parliamentary from those two citations.

However, I did check a third citation. I noted under *Beauchesne* 492 that "the following expressions are a partial listing of expressions which have caused intervention on the part of the Chair" – in other words, one could assume that they would have been deemed unparliamentary – and nowhere do I see within citation 492 that "fearmongering" or the word "mongering" have caused the chair to intervene at any time.

I do recall, however, on several occasions in this House over the past number of years where, perhaps, government members have used the term "fearmongering." No points of order were raised then. I also remember, if memory serves correctly, that certain members of the opposition have used the term "fearmongering," and no intervention was applied then either.

So I would submit for your consideration, Mr. Speaker, that there are examples where this wordage has been used before and no interventions were created and that if, in fact, something did come from the hon. minister referenced that caused some anxieties, those issues can and will be reviewed. But I do know that the hon. minister in his comments felt that there was some fearmongering that had occurred and he was merely expressing his opinion in that regard. I think his feeling, as explained by the minister to me prior to this issue coming up, is that any comments that are made should be based more on scientific fact or on evidence or on direct, provable experience or whatever, and that's the context within which I think those comments were made.

So, Mr. Speaker, given the cut and thrust of debate, as we all know occurs in this House from time to time, perhaps there were some misunderstandings, and I will look forward to your ruling in that respect.

The Speaker: Any others?

Well, at the outset, the intervention in terms of what was said came on behalf of the Official Opposition House Leader on behalf of the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View. There's absolutely no doubt at all about what the hon. Minister of Environment said, and this is: "... but I know that the Liberal environmental critic has been out there fearmongering relative to what is all wrong, and that is wrong." This is a partial one. Then it goes on, "We're taking that action, but to take a group of people together with no knowledge at all and start fearmongering to them is irresponsible and wrong, and we will never do that." Then going on to a subsequent one, "In fact, if it is determined, not by the fearmongering and all of the opinion that some others are promoting out there but based on fact," and then

in the third response, "We're taking that action, but to take a group of people together with no knowledge at all and start fearmongering to them is irresponsible and wrong, and we will never do that." That's a repetition of what I just said a second ago.

The word was used. There's absolutely no doubt at all about that. But if one wants to go to *Marleau and Montpetit* on pages 525 and 526, so much of it is based on "the tone, manner and intention of the Member speaking; the person to whom the words were directed; the degree of provocation; and, most importantly, whether or not the remarks created disorder in the Chamber." I'm not so sure in terms of what I've just quoted that it would apply today, but the bottom line is that the language in itself, while it may not be unparliamentary, has to be taken in the context of what it is.

It would have been very helpful if the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View had heard the remarks directly. Such is not the case. I do not believe that it's in the best interests of anyone in this House to use the word "fearmongering" in the way that it was used. It was almost intentional in terms of providing an allegation or a motive, and it certainly was intemperate language. I'm not happy with the utilization of the word or the words in this and will caution the hon. Minister of Environment to disassociate himself with the use of that kind of language in the future, as I would ask all hon. members to do the same thing.

Hon. members, I want to provide just a bit of advice. It is rumoured that perhaps we'll be here for, say, only another six weeks or eight weeks or something like this. It's my experience in the past that as we get towards the conclusion of a session, tempers start to flare a little more and patience becomes a little less. It's also my experience that at this time in a session we may have increasing numbers of points of order simply based on body language and words and utilization and a whole series of other things. I would ask everybody to just sit back, take a great big deep breath, and remember that you're all wonderful elected leaders of the province of Alberta, here to do the public good, and there is some give and take. Maybe this is the time when we actually do have a little more give and take. It's like the bodychecking in the third overtime period at about 1 o'clock this morning: there was a lot being given there that could have been called but was not necessary to call. So if we can deal with it that way. Let's move on.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Private Bills
Third Reading**

[The members indicated below moved that the following bills be read a third time, and the motions were carried]

Pr.1	Burns Memorial Trust Amendment Act, 2006	Brown (for Rodney)
Pr.2	Mary Immaculate Hospital of Mundare Act	Jablonski
Pr.3	Edmonton Community Foundation Amendment Act, 2006	Lukaszuk

head: **Government Bills and Orders
Third Reading**

**Bill 9
Income and Employment Supports Amendment Act, 2006**

Mr. Shariff: Mr. Speaker, I move third reading of Bill 9, the Income and Employment Supports Amendment Act, 2006.

I appreciated hearing many thoughtful comments and discussion on this bill. To recap, Bill 9 will provide more flexibility to take the individual circumstances of some grant-funded students into account

and clarify authority to establish forms pertaining to child support agreements.

Thank you.

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 9 read a third time]

3:20

Bill 26
Mandatory Testing and Disclosure Act

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

Mr. Magnus: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to move third reading of Bill 26, the Mandatory Testing and Disclosure Act.

I'd also like to thank a number of the stakeholders for their very good work over the summer last year: the police, the firefighters, the paramedic profession, the Alberta Medical Association, the College of Physicians and Surgeons, the regional health authority, the medical officers of health, the Alberta Advisory Committee on AIDS, and the Alberta Community Council on HIV. I'd like to thank all members for their support of this bill.

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 26 read a third time]

Bill 11
Architects Amendment Act, 2006

Ms DeLong: Mr. Speaker, I rise to move third reading of Bill 11, the Architects Amendment Act, 2006.

I would like to thank those who participated in the discussions on this bill. Everyone's comments were most helpful. Mr. Speaker, this act will help to clarify and strengthen the architect profession by allowing the Alberta Association of Architects to clarify its governance of licensed interior designers and enforce the requirement for mandatory continuing competence in their profession.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Flaherty: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We support this bill, and to review, these changes allow the Alberta Association of Architects to clarify its governance of licensed interior designers and enforce the requirement for compulsory continuing competence in their profession. The bill clarifies that licensed interior designers and their employees can engage in the practice of interior design, allows them full voting rights to elect architects and interior designers to the association council, and also ensures that up-to-date regulations and bylaws can be developed for licensed interior designers that are registered in the same manner as architects.

If you visit the city of St. Albert, you will see how the core of the city is being enhanced, and the Arts and Heritage Foundation, I believe it is, is a perfect example of what the planning of these two professions would do together. Also, I believe that if you look at the city of Edmonton, the new mayor has talked about the significance of this.

We support the bill and are pleased to see it go through. Thank you.

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 11 read a third time]

Bill 12
Land Titles Amendment Act, 2006

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Government Services.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to move third reading of Bill 12, the Land Titles Amendment Act, 2006.

Mortgage fraud is a complex and costly crime that impacts a variety of sectors. This bill will go a long way to combat mortgage fraud by empowering the land titles office to take a more active role in detecting and preventing mortgage fraud by requiring proof of identity of a person registering a transfer and in some cases refusing registration. In addition, this bill will assist the Privacy Commissioner with determining what uses of land titles information are acceptable under the Personal Information Protection Act.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise again and speak on third reading of Bill 12, the Land Titles Amendment Act, 2006. I think it's a really good bill, and I'm willing to voice my support for this bill. It appears to be primarily aimed at cleaning up and updating the language. I'm happy with this bill.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

It's good to see that we are making the needed changes in response to the problems associated with mortgage fraud in Alberta, but I want to make sure that the government is still considering some points. For example, I have a few questions. What steps is the government going to take to stop the assumption of a mortgage? I know that it's related to real estate, but real estate and the land titles are very much connected.

I mentioned in second reading that we highlight sales by the government, any transfers of land. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar asked many questions. Some questions were related to 15 years ago, and it's very hard to answer those questions at this time. But if we had some amendment in the land title, if we highlighted in the land title all the properties sold by the government or transferred by the government that we still can trace out in the last, say, 50 years, it would be easy for the government to answer those questions. My suggestion is this: that from today onwards in the land titles all the government-related sales and purchases or transfers of land should be highlighted, and it should be publicized in the newspaper if something is going on with a sale and purchase.

Also, when somebody pulls a land title, they pay \$6, \$7 for every land title report. They don't get the full history, the full property archive report of the land title. This is not right. Suppose that you buy any product. You have every right to know the full history of the property. They are not buying vegetables. They're buying properties.

I mean, now we have a problem. The Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar asked so many questions about fraud – maybe fraud, maybe not – but still every time I'm listening here, the hon. minister is answering: this question is related to 15 years ago or 20 years ago. If we had a system in the land titles – just punch out all the properties sold or purchased or transferred in the last 50 years; click one button – you should be able to find out. It's not there. If we really want transparency – and in the land titles report it is a must – the government should consider it very seriously for the future misuse and, you know, mix-up like we have today.

RECA is responsible also. RECA is doing a marvellous job in the real estate association. At this moment the major problem that they

are facing is the assumption of the mortgage. Like, one person had the mortgage from the bank, and they transferred it to somebody else. What we normally see, those advertisements in the paper – many sitting here in this Chamber might have seen “zero down payment” or “you pay \$10,000; you move in” or something like that. Why can’t we see that in the land titles report? If we find all the details in the land titles report, it will make the job easy for the real estate. It will make the job easy for the banks because it’s a big problem for the banks as well. Assumption of the mortgage must be stopped. It’s only in Alberta, I think. In other provinces they don’t allow you to assume the mortgage. I think that assuming the mortgage is a major problem. RECA and the real estate board are trying to stop this practice. But still I want to know why they haven’t stopped assumption of the mortgage so far.

3:30

The detail of the full property archive report, including assumption of the mortgage, including the highlight of all the properties purchased, sold, and transferred by the government, must be highlighted in the land title. The system should be like this: you just click, 15 years of records from the government, and one person using just a PC, you know, sitting at home can pull out all the information. In 1981 how many lands, properties, or buildings were sold by the government of Alberta? The person, even an ordinary person in Alberta, should be able to trace out all the records. That’s transparency. The government must be accountable for that, and it’s not happening.

I tried to explain this in second reading, and I’m trying to explain it again. It’s for the benefit of all Albertans. Those frauds must be stopped.

Mr. Backs: Do you think they’re listening?

Mr. Agnihotri: I don’t think so.

Anyway, the government should create a task force, a task force who could stop the frauds. Frauds are happening, and the realtors admit – I have read many articles. It’s through transparency, through the clear archive report that the land title can help to stop fraud in the real estate business. Some people, they don’t work; they just make deals under the table. It shouldn’t happen. It’s our responsibility. We are the elected officials, and we have the responsibility so that frauds in Alberta should not happen. This is my suggestion.

Otherwise, this bill is mostly cleaning up and updating the language. It’s a good thing. But we should go a little bit further. An ordinary person should be able to get the full report in the land title, and it will help the real estate board to stop the fraud.

Mr. Speaker, that’s all I have to say. This is my suggestion. It’s totally up to the government because it’s in their hands.

Thank you.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It’s with interest, again, that I rise and participate in the debate on Bill 12, the Land Titles Amendment Act, 2006, this afternoon. Overall, I would have to say that I would support these changes to the Land Titles Act. Certainly, when we consider that one of these changes was recommended by the mortgage fraud committee at the Law Society of Alberta and is supported by that committee, we have to take notice of that recommendation and support it. Also, this bill reflects recent commentary from the Privacy Commissioner. The hon. Minister of Government Services made reference to that earlier.

We have to be very careful with our land titles and the administration of our land titles. I’ve had in recent months first-hand experience with land titles. I’m the first to admit that I learned a lot about the entire process, and I’m still interested in learning more, but to have information accessible to potential purchasers of properties is very, very important. I certainly hope that at any time we’re not going to try to hide behind the privacy cloak in regard to this matter. If a party is considering purchasing a property, they should, either themselves or through their legal counsel, have the right to access that information in a timely fashion and for a modest price.

Certainly, whenever you look at any historical title of a property in Alberta, there’s a lot of information on there. Information can be related to past market value. Information can be related to parties that have had a caveat on the property for whatever reason. It could even be a caveat relating to remediation costs of an environmental spill. It could be any number of things, Mr. Speaker, that could be on there. When we look at property values in this city and in this province, we have to make sure that consumers – because for a lot of us the biggest purchase we’re ever going to make is a piece of property of one sort or another, we have to make sure that the land title system works.

In conclusion, I would urge the hon. minister and his department to make sure that the land titles system works in a timely fashion so that buyers and sellers and their agents are not hindered by delays in the whole process. I’m certainly not stating that this bill will slow down the process, but the Department of Government Services is spending a lot of money. I understand that there is more money needed to make sure that this process and this system work for buyers and sellers of real estate in this province in a secure and timely manner.

With that I will cede the floor to another hon. member of this House. Certainly, Bill 12 is of merit, and I hope everything works out. Thank you.

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill 12, Land Titles Amendment Act, 2006, has the support of the NDP caucus. It’s a bill that really addresses a growing problem in the province related to land titles, mortgage fraud, and what have you. The two are obviously related. So legislation needs to be updated, changed, improved, amended to take stock of the growing problem and find effective solutions to the increasing incidence of fraud related to mortgage in this province.

It really is too bad that we are getting a reputation as being, sort of, the mortgage fraud capital of the country. Partly, I guess, it can be attributed to the number of transactions that are related to property: purchase, transfer, property changing hands in this province. Given the economic activity related to real estate transactions, one would expect problems along this line. I remain unconvinced that all of this problem can be attributed to the increase in economic activity. Clearly, the laws in place are wanting, are failing in what they’re supposed to do. So this bill is an attempt, I guess, to recognize that there is a problem and do something about it.

3:40

Giving powers now to the registrar to be able to refuse registry for certain transactions unless the registrar is fully satisfied with respect to the identity of the persons involved in the transactions I think is a good thing. But I think the whole issue of identity in itself is problematic, given that identity fraud itself has also become a problem in this province.

I am sure that while we are giving more discretionary powers to the registrar to make sure that identity documentation is there when

he or she considers it necessary to confirm identity, we need to work on the side of making sure that the documents needed for personal identity themselves are also dependable and sound.

That's where the problem of private registries has come up, and in this House during this spring session we have visited that issue as well in relation to another piece of legislation, which was debated in this House a month or more ago.

Clarifying and strengthening the powers of the registrar with respect to confirmation of identity is important. I don't think these by themselves will lead to a substantial reduction in crime related to the fraudulent mortgages.

I think identity is a problem and one hopes that there will be more specific legislative action forthcoming to deal with that. Unless we deal at both levels, on both fronts, I think the problem will remain. Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, while I'm happy that the registrar will have the power to ask for documentation for identity, it's the power that's given: he "may" do that or she "may" do that. I think that given the high incidence of mortgage fraud in this province and given the fact that we know that it's been increasing over the years, perhaps it should be made mandatory that the registrar seek appropriate identification before proceeding to okay a registration.

Furthermore, if the registrar were to have that kind of power, then there is also, I think, a need for making room for an appeal by someone who may find that the action of the registrar in refusing registration based on his concerns is unwarranted. I think that to make sure that the laws are implemented properly but also respected by all who are affected by them, the room for appeal perhaps should also have been there. It's not there now, but I hope that there will be attention paid to improving this piece of statute later on with respect to that issue.

The last point I want to make, Mr. Speaker, is the need to strengthen, perhaps, the consequences for those who engage in mortgage fraud. Certainly, they are open to criminal prosecution, but I think there need to be in addition some consequences in terms of monetary sentences or monetary requirements in what they have to pay if they are found to be guilty of mortgage fraud. In some cases this mortgage fraud leads to massive, massive amounts of exchange of money through illegitimate activity. That's the only other observation that I wanted to make on the bill in general.

We certainly are in support of the provisions of the bill, but I think in some ways this bill will need further improvement once it becomes law and we have had the opportunity to use it for a while and find some flaws, too few of which I have drawn attention to in my remarks.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Any others?

The hon. Minister of Government Services to close debate.

Mr. VanderBurg: I thank the members for Edmonton-Gold Bar, Edmonton-Ellerslie, and Edmonton-Strathcona for their comments, and I will take that advice seriously.

Mr. Speaker, I'd ask for the question to be called.

[Motion carried; Bill 12 read a third time]

Bill 15
International Interests in
Mobile Aircraft Equipment Act

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Community Development on behalf of.

Mr. Ducharme: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations I'm pleased to

move third reading of Bill 15, the International Interests in Mobile Aircraft Equipment Act.

Mr. Speaker, this bill creates the legislative authority for Alberta to participate in an international registry of financial interests in aircraft equipment. In plain language it is largely a registry of liens against airplanes. With such a registry banks can provide better secured loans to airlines with a corresponding drop in interest rates and costs.

Canada has already signed but not ratified the two international agreements that create the registry. The federal government will ratify when a critical mass of provinces indicates support. With Bill 15 Alberta shows that support. In passing this bill, Alberta becomes the third province to create a link to the international registry. We can expect ratification in 12 to 18 months.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 15 does not amend Alberta's Personal Property Security Act. It affects no other Alberta registries. The international registry will be self-financing, so there is no cost to this government, and we will work with other jurisdictions to ensure consistent implementation across the country.

I encourage all members to support the International Interests in Mobile Aircraft Equipment Act. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very interested and pleased to rise and speak in support of Bill 15, International Interests in Mobile Aircraft Equipment Act, on behalf of the Liberal Official Opposition. If the intended effects of this act come forward, there will be a decrease expected in insurance costs for commercial airlines. There will be a decrease in interest costs for mobile aircraft equipment. If it's a decrease for commercial airlines, hopefully that will bring about some greater competition, and the competition in costs will result in lower airline ticket costs. If there are lower airline ticket costs, it will obviously reduce the need for the government to have its airline fleet and to use its private airline fleet. Perhaps then we could be looking to seek the sale of the government aircraft that we have, and I look forward to that, you know, as being a good effect of Bill 15 in coming forward on this.

I'll just touch on some background, though. Prior to 2001 the risk level for lending money to companies wishing to purchase aircraft equipment was high. Aircraft do not have a fixed location. Countries adhere to different sets of legal rules, making the process for debt collection difficult. In November 2001 the Cape Town convention was held in South Africa to attempt to mitigate this financial risk. At the convention no fewer than 20 states, followed subsequently by two others, signed the convention on international interests in mobile equipment and the protocol on matters specific to aircraft equipment.

In 2004 Canada signed the convention and protocol. Signing the convention means that Canada will adhere to an international registry when purchasing large mobile equipment similar to a vehicle registry. Given that the registry is a provincial responsibility, provincial implementing legislation is needed before Canada ratifies the agreement. That's why we have this legislation essentially coming into force. It has been moved through the first and reading reading, Committee of the Whole and such and is almost complete in its debate. The effect will be good. There has been support from the finance industry, support from the airline industry. Some of our companies that have done well here in Alberta in growing up look to support this bill, and I think it's a good thing.

3:50

You know, it might be good to look after this is ratified and if see some effects from it in reducing insurance in the long term, airline

costs, as I said, will be reduced for good companies like WestJet that would benefit from this. Then at this time of year we could be flying or having others fly here to enjoy our Edmonton Oilers winning the Stanley Cup two years from now, their third in a row. It'll be their third Stanley Cup in a row, you know. If necessary, we can send some players out for special dental work in those times.

The effect of the bill, I hope, will reduce those airline rates. I think it is going to have some good affects in the long term.

I hope that it does go through in terms of getting its full ratification soon. With that, I support this bill. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 15, International Interests in Mobile Aircraft Equipment Act. It's a bill that I did speak to in its second reading and indicated the NDP caucus support for the bill. I am looking at the introductory remarks made with respect to this bill by the then minister of international and intergovernmental affairs. I totally agree with the reason that he gave as to why this legislation needs to be passed by this Assembly, in order for Canada to be able to ratify two international conventions and agreements that it put its signatures to. We will become, I guess, the third or the fourth province that will be passing this legislation.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, we are in Assembly. We're not in committee. You need to be back at your seat.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's so quiet in the House sometimes, you begin to wonder, you know, what's going on here.

I think the purpose for this bill being brought forward and the reasons for us all to support it are quite clear and uncontroversial. One point that I want to draw attention to that was made by the then minister of international and intergovernmental affairs, who introduced the bill, has to do with these treaties that are ratified leading to a reduction in the lending rates that purchasers of airline equipment, mostly airline companies, will have to pay. It was suggested and a hope was expressed by the minister at the time that if these lending rates that banks charge come down for the purchase of this very expensive equipment – aircraft are very expensive, and the equipment that's used in them to modify or change or repair is also very expensive – given the fact that the overall cost to buy and maintain these machines will come down, that will mean, perhaps, that some of the savings resulting from this will be passed on to customers.

I think that's a tall order, certainly a very interesting hope expressed there, but will that happen is a question. I think that with the rising cost of travel, Albertans and Canadians in general would be very much interested in seeing some measures taken, in legislation if necessary, to ensure that some of these reductions in cost are indeed passed on to the users of the services provided by the airline industry.

Certainly, this bill is not the vehicle for undertaking such measures, but I hope that this will not fall off the agenda, that if indeed there are savings resulting from the passage of this bill and ultimately the treaties coming into place, then savings made by the airline industry will be shared with the users; that is, you and me, the travelling public of Alberta and Canada.

That said, Mr. Speaker, I want to express our support for this bill in third reading. Thank you.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, in regard to Bill 15, the International Interests in Mobile Aircraft Equipment Act, it's one that I can support, but I certainly cannot support this government's current practices surrounding their frequent international travels on other commercial aircraft.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Any others?

The hon. Minister of Community Development on behalf of the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations to close debate.

Mr. Ducharme: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 15 read a third time]

Bill 27

Vegetable Sales (Alberta) Act Repeal Act

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace on behalf of the minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure on behalf of the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development to move third reading of Bill 27, the Vegetable Sales (Alberta) Act Repeal Act.

I believe that we've had extensive discussion on this bill in second and in committee, and I would ask for support again from the hon. members in third.

Thank you.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, on behalf of the Official Opposition at this time I would say that Bill 27, the Vegetable Sales (Alberta) Act Repeal Act, is one that we can support now that all vegetables produced in the province are graded with national standards in mind and the fact that this bill removes the Vegetable Sales (Alberta) Act plus two other enabling regulations from the statutes. I think that when we discuss this bill, we should be cognizant of the fact that so much legislation has been attempted in the past to be moved through this Assembly through Miscellaneous Statutes. This was one piece of legislation that at one time was considered under Miscellaneous Statutes.

4:00

I think, not only in this matter but in other matters, it's better for democracy, it's better for the government that people be given an opportunity to get on the public record if they have any issues whenever bills are drafted and introduced and debated in this Assembly so that people have a chance. One cannot forget – whether they're in power for six months or six years or in some cases 35 years, governments can't be afraid to put all their legislative ideas before the Legislative Assembly. This may seem like a rather boring matter. It may be a very boring matter for some members, but when you think of the fact that all government ideas and policies should come before this Assembly, it's a good idea that we have an opportunity to discuss the implications of ideas and policies before the Assembly. The notion that we can put everything through in Miscellaneous Statutes is misguided. It's wrong.

In conclusion, I would remind all hon. members of this Assembly, whether they were present or not in the year 2001, when Miscella-

neous Statutes was the best part of three-eighths or half-an-inch thick, and there were a lot of policy changes involved in that. So one has to be very, very careful about what we put and what we do not put in Miscellaneous Statutes.

I'm pleased to support this bill, and I'm pleased to see that it was stand-alone legislation. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, may we briefly revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**
(*reversion*)

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

Ms Haley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm just really pleased to be able to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly three of my favourite people in the whole world: my son Jeff, who works for our Minister of Finance, his beautiful wife, Layna, and their wonderful son, probably Alberta's next best up-and-coming hockey player, Mr. Austin Mulligan. I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of our House.

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Third Reading

Bill 27
Vegetable Sales (Alberta) Act Repeal Act
(*continued*)

Dr. Pannu: Mr. Speaker, I don't want to miss this opportunity to speak on this bill. It's a bill about repealing a piece of legislation. In my little more than nine years in the Assembly I don't think I have had an opportunity to speak on a bill that repeals an existing piece of legislation, so it's very important. Secondly, it's spring-time, so spring cleanup time has come, I think, and this bill is in the spirit of doing that.

[The Speaker in the chair]

I was looking at the news release that the minister of agriculture issued to explain what this bill is about. It's interesting to note that this legislation has been around for 50 years and hasn't been used and has been found of no use for the last 20 years at least. Very, very interesting. I didn't realize that there is, in fact, federal legislation that serves the purposes that at one time the existing law of the province called the Vegetable Sales Act was supposed to serve.

So the bill is now considered to be redundant. No one uses it, no one seems to pay attention to it, and no one sees the need to continue to have this piece of legislation on the books of this province. There are two regulations, I guess, that are associated with Vegetable Sales (Alberta) Act that will also die a silent death as this bill is repealed. I think it's time for cleaning up our statute books, and this bill is a good candidate for it.

Mr. Speaker, I support the repeal of the Vegetable Sales (Alberta) Act, which Bill 27 intends to accomplish, hence my support for Bill 27. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm so happy the House is going to "lettuce" have a final look at this bill before we "squash"

it. This has "bean" a very contentious bill, and as a matter of fact, the opposition was certainly able to "turnip" the heat on this bad boy. So I would suggest that you "peas" give us full consideration as this may improve the "celery" of our farmers.

Thank you.

Mr. Backs: Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to rise to support the Vegetable Sales (Alberta) Act Repeal Act. You know, it's not particularly a hot potato, this act. It really isn't too corny, and there really was no need for the government to move with a carrot-and-stick approach on this particular piece of legislation. We do not have to get really into depth on how to "repeel" this vegetable sales act.

I just rise in support. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Shall I call on the hon. Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace to close the debate or call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 27 read a third time]

Bill 30
Persons with Developmental Disabilities
Community Governance Amendment Act, 2006

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

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this afternoon and move third reading of Bill 30, the Persons with Developmental Disabilities Community Governance Amendment Act, 2006.

During the first two readings members on both sides of the Assembly supported Bill 30 and what it proposes. I appreciated their comments and questions during our discussion.

Mr. Speaker, as we've discussed many times during this session, the persons with developmental disabilities, or PDD, program is extremely important. It provides assistance to approximately 9,300 Albertans with developmental disabilities so that they can live actively as part of our communities. Bill 30 will help strengthen this very important community focus of the PDD program. Dissolving the PDD Provincial Board and transferring its roles and responsibilities to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports will enable the ministry to enhance the overall accountability of the PDD program. This governance change will also enhance the role of the PDD community boards in delivering programs that support the inclusion of persons with developmental disabilities into community life.

In short, Bill 30 will enhance the way Alberta administers the PDD program, which will help our government better respond to the needs of Albertans who receive PDD-funded supports. I think that's something all the hon. members would celebrate.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank all of my colleagues on both sides of the Chamber for their support and for the questions that they raised during the debate. I ask that they once again support Bill 30 and pass it through third reading.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

4:10

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and to participate in the debate this afternoon on Bill 30, Persons with Developmental Disabilities Community Gover-

nance Amendment Act, 2006. As it has been going through the Assembly, we certainly have to support this bill.

I have cautious optimism that this bill will meet its objectives when we look at eliminating the Persons with Developmental Disabilities Provincial Board that oversees the six regional community boards, when we see that we are transferring responsibility of the provincial board to the ministry. This, as I understand it, will enhance the role of the six regional community boards. These boards, as I understand it, will be reporting directly to the minister and will be responsible for the local governance, program delivery, and co-ordinating of other supports.

I certainly hope that with these changes no one in the PDD community will have to be as active as they've had to be this past spring to ensure that their budgets at least meet the inflation rate and meet other cost pressures that PDD boards have been faced with. I know that there was an increase. But, again, was it enough? We have to make sure that persons with developmental disabilities – and I've said it here before in this House, and I'm going to say it again – and everyone in this province can live in dignity and with respect. Certainly, people who work with individuals with developmental disabilities do their very, very best to ensure that people have the opportunity to live in decency and respect.

We can't dismiss or we can't ignore their pleas for financial assistance. They're necessary. They're needed. Some of these boards have in the past done remarkable things with the money that they have been allocated. Hopefully, Mr. Speaker, in the future this government will ensure that the practice of having to write letters and e-mails or visit respective members of this Assembly in their constituency offices or phone the minister's office or visit the minister's office before the budget is determined will no longer be necessary. Hopefully, these individuals will be able to count on a budget that reflects the cost pressures that we talked about earlier.

Now, whenever we talk about persons with developmental disabilities as we're doing in Bill 30, we cannot forget other individuals who have disabilities, but they're not developmental disabilities. We cannot forget about their needs as well. If it means that we have to have other measures so that they can participate in the workforce and maybe get some additional income in the time that they can work, I think that we should study this issue more. We should have a look at the entire issue of accessibility for people with disabilities.

I was astonished a couple of years ago that in this Assembly, Mr. Speaker, we had chosen to lock a door for a period of time which provided access to people who get around in wheelchairs. We had them coming in the loading ramp down by the press gallery. That ramp was steep. I asked questions in the Assembly about it. I was glad to see that finally the other ramp, which had the proper building code slope to it so people in wheelchairs could have easier access to these premises, was finally opened up. But that's only one example of what we can do. Whether people have developmental disabilities or another disability, we cannot forget those citizens, and we must in this Assembly make sure that we do everything so that they can live again in dignity and respect. If they can work or do any sort of community volunteer work, it should be encouraged. We should make sure that they have every opportunity to participate.

With that, I would conclude my remarks on Bill 30. Let's not forget that everyone has the right, again, to live in dignity and respect. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise again and speak in third reading of Bill 30, Persons with Developmental

Disabilities Community Governance Amendment Act. This bill eliminates the Persons with Developmental Disabilities Provincial Board that oversees the six regional community boards, transfers responsibilities of the provincial board to the ministry, and enhances the role of the six regional community boards. The regional community boards will report directly to the minister and will be responsible for local governance, program delivery, and co-ordinating other supports. According to the government of Alberta news release from April 11, 2006, the goal of this reform is to "enhance the role of the community boards that administer services . . . while improving the province's ability to better co-ordinate all the programs that provide support to Albertans with disabilities."

Mr. Speaker, the changes in this bill to the system are absolutely necessary, and we have recently requested that the minister conduct a comprehensive review of the governance structure. However, we do not know how the minister arrived at the decision to eliminate the provincial board in order to improve efficiency or how the changes will impact the community boards. The community boards we contacted were unable to comment on how the elimination of the provincial board would impact their operation. The minister claims that the goal of this reform is to improve accountability and transparency, yet the community boards have been directed to not comment hardly on improvements.

The community boards are supposed to represent adults with disabilities, their families, service providers, and advocacy groups.

We hope that this role will be strengthened under the new structure rather than just being a voiceless arm of the government. A report conducted by former MLA Lorne Taylor on the PDD governance structure has not been made public. It may contain a recommendation on eliminating the provincial board, but we would like the report to be made public.

Mr. Speaker, I have a few questions that may be useful in the future. Building Better Bridges is a report on programs and services in support of Persons with Developmental Disabilities, PDD, released in March 2000. It contains 10 recommendations directed toward improving the governance and service delivery of the PDD programs as well as addressing the needs of other persons with disabilities who do not fit under current mandates. This review did not recommend eliminating the provincial board. How was the decision made? This is the question I want to ask. What review or reports were completed? Which groups were consulted?

4:20

Lorne Taylor prepared a report in the fall of 2005. When will this be made public? When will Albertans be able to see the recommendations made by Lorne Taylor about the PDD governance structure? Did the report recommend the elimination of the provincial board? Why were community boards given the direction to forward all questions to the department? How are we supposed to understand and evaluate the impacts of this change on community boards when they have been directed to not answer questions? How much money will be saved and where? How will that money be allocated? What arrangements have been made to prepare the department to take on these additional responsibilities? Given that 35 provincial board staff are being transferred to the ministry, what specific changes will be made to ensure that programs are being delivered in a more co-ordinated, effective, and efficient way?

This minister claims that this reform will improve accountability, administrative efficiency, transparency, and create a more equitable delivery of programs. How? What steps will the department take to ensure that services are delivered in a fair and effective way? What steps will the ministry take to improve transparency?

These are my few questions. Otherwise, we support this bill, and we still can consider these few questions in the future for the good. That's all I have to say. Thank you very much.

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to make some brief comments on Bill 30, Persons with Developmental Disabilities Community Governance Amendment Act, 2006. On the face of it, Mr. Speaker, the piece of legislation, in its third reading before us, is certainly about changing the way programs related to the services that are made available to Albertans with developmental disabilities are administered. The administrative changes being sought by way of this piece of legislation result from the fact that the programs that support adults with disabilities were placed under the Ministry of Seniors and Community Supports in November 2004. So it's a response to structural and institutional changes that have taken place within the government's and the departmental structures. So far so good.

While we've been talking about changing administration in response to the changes in the ministerial responsibilities that impact particularly the adults with developmental disabilities and the services provided to them, the persons with developmental disabilities were seeking, in fact, answers to different kinds of questions. They were on the steps of the Legislature not long ago asking for action, which had more to do with the adequacy of resources and the services that are presently available to them. They were asking for enhanced resources for the purpose of improving the quality of the services that they are receiving, and they were also seeking a greater institutional responsiveness so that their needs are met in a timely and appropriate manner.

The question that comes to mind, of course, is will the administrative and governance changes that are proposed in this piece of legislation also address the issues of institutional responsiveness and resource adequacy seen from the side of the persons with developmental disabilities who need these services, who need these services on a regular basis, and need these services in a way that both protects their dignity and supports their daily needs that result from the disabilities from which they suffer. Whether or not these administrative changes and changes in governance will in fact enhance that institutional responsiveness remains to be seen. We'll have to wait, I guess, a couple of years to see how these changes being proposed impact in regard to the express desire on the part of persons with developmental disabilities for more responsive institutional arrangements.

There is in this bill, obviously, no room for addressing the need of adequacy and budgetary allocations. The rally on the steps of the Legislature two or three weeks ago by both the advocates for persons with developmental disabilities and by persons with developmental disabilities was also about the perceived cut of close to 3.5 per cent in the budgetary allocations to deal with the resource side of their concerns. Certainly, this bill doesn't address that. The fact that there has been a reduction in the budget for them is regrettable, certainly, but the administrative and governance changes proposed here I think will have to await the test of time for us to know whether they will increase either efficiency or accountability or increase responsiveness, which is in fact the concern expressed by adults suffering from developmental disabilities.

So there is only a limited impact that the changes here, even if they have a positive impact, will have on the daily living experiences of Albertans with developmental disabilities. The part that really concerns me and certainly concerns the recipients of these services has to do with the reduction in the budgetary allocations to them,

which necessarily, from their perspective and in my view, will lead to a reduction in the quality of services and the responsiveness of the institutions that provide those services.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will conclude my remarks on Bill 30 in its third reading. Thank you.

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

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will be very brief on Bill 30. It's a reorganization, and perhaps this is a good thing. I think my colleague was just talking about the other problems. The question that has been raised with me by some of the groups, certainly in a meeting I had in Calgary, is that there should be some savings involved here. I expect that's what the government's saying. We were told when the debates were occurring here and people were coming forward that the minister at the time said that this bill is important, that somehow by passing this bill, it would lead to better service for the people that required the service.

4:30

The question I sort of ask: is there a savings by doing this? The question that they had, Mr. Speaker: will that savings, then, go to the families and the clients? I'm not sure if this is true. I remember them saying that they felt that this board was being administered with something like \$11 million or in that range of money. The question they had: would that money be transferred? Is that how the minister was justifying that this would have some impact? Because with just the reorganization, that's fine, but it's not getting to the people that need it, and there are some very serious concerns about that. I'm raising this question because it was asked of me, and I don't have the answer, so I'm hoping that the hon. member will have that answer.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: Question.

The Speaker: The question has been called.

Hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, no need to close the debate. Then the question will be called.

[Motion carried; Bill 30 read a third time]

Bill 24

Fiscal Responsibility Amendment Act, 2006

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mrs. McClellan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to move third reading of Bill 24, Fiscal Responsibility Amendment Act, 2006.

Mr. Speaker, through the second reading and in committee there have been some excellent comments and thoughts provided on this bill, nothing in the way of questions other than through comments. So I think I've been able to respond to anything that was there.

I look forward to the comments in third reading and again, Mr. Speaker, will search *Hansard*, and if there are any unanswered questions, we'll be pleased to respond in writing to the members.

Mr. Martin: Just very briefly. I like the title Fiscal Responsibility Amendment Act. Now, only a good Conservative spin doctor could take that title at the same time that we're jumping the limit up of what we can spend. I might call it the fiscal irresponsibility act, but I guess it's all in the matter of spin.

I know why we're doing it, and I can't recall if she indicated what it looks like down the way. I mean, this limit was raised to – I think it's \$5.3 billion. Is this something that we're going to have to look forward to in terms of next year's budget, the budget after that, or by this one jump does the hon. Finance minister feel that this will sort of solve the problems as we're going forward? This is a fair chunk of cash. It goes from \$4 billion in 2004, \$4.7 billion in 2005, and \$5.3 billion. So we can see trends there, and I think that must be somewhat disconcerting for the Minister of Finance. Just in conclusion, I would ask her if she could give us some indication of where she sees this going.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, in previous bills that we've dealt with earlier this afternoon the chair has ascertained no movement from individuals with respect to Standing Order 29(2)(a), and I gather that there's no request for participation with the questions here either.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, when we have a look at this bill and the title, Fiscal Responsibility Amendment Act, 2006, we have to recognize that in Alberta thrifty Tories are a very scarce political commodity these days. When we look at the spending habits of this government, we recognize that "thrifty" and "Tory" are words that don't get along. When we look at the spending that goes on here, there's a significant increase in spending. So when we look at this bill, the Fiscal Responsibility Amendment Act, one again has to wonder.

I know that we talked earlier in debate about this, and we're certainly increasing the amount of nonrenewable resource revenue that can be used for the budget purposes, from 4 and three-quarter billion dollars to \$5.3 billion, but we should be careful. The Minister of Finance I think means well, works very hard, but again "thrifty" and "Tory" don't get along these days.

Everyone in the province is stating that we should legislate to save, and this government is legislating to spend. Now, that is a contradiction. I noticed in the Appropriation Act that was introduced earlier that we're certainly going to set aside a billion dollars for the Alberta heritage savings trust fund. That's a start. It's a modest start. I think the minister will do the right thing and make every effort immediately to ensure that the heritage savings trust fund is at least inflation-proofed, brought up to a pool of cash that should be larger than \$19 billion.

Now, the Alberta Liberals, the Official Opposition, have a plan for investing Alberta's surplus dollars that would create a lasting legacy for this province, but I don't see a solid plan, Mr. Speaker, from the current government. We have also long-term vision. We have a savings plan. We have a spending plan. When we look at some of the other sound fiscal ideas that this government has adopted from us, I wouldn't say too much – I would say very little – if they were to take our investment plan and use it. I think it would be wise. Imitation is a fine form of flattery. It doesn't matter whether we call it the sustainability fund or the stability fund, but that was one of our past economic planks, and this government has adopted that.

Now, instead of talking about where we'll invest the surplus during the next quarter century, as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview said during budget debate, let's talk about the next quarter of a century, and instead of the next fiscal quarter, let's talk about the next quarter of a century. When we look at this legislation, we have to stop and think and ask this question: how do we want Alberta to look in 50 years?

4:40

Earlier today we had a discussion, and I listened with great interest to the comments from both the Minister of Energy and the

Minister of Environment in regard to the development of the coal-bed methane industry. If we're talking about fiscal responsibility, Mr. Speaker, we should also be talking about environmental responsibility. We all know that as conventional natural gas production declines, regardless of the price we're going to be faced in the near future with a reduction in the amount of money that we collect for the treasury.

So it is wise, it is prudent to facilitate environmentally sound coal-bed methane development policies. The development of coal-bed methane should proceed slowly, and it should proceed so that landowners and industry can both have confidence that the policies will protect the environment and also ensure that there is a return on the investment by the resource companies. I think there's a balance to be met there, and I think that that balance can be achieved. I'm not so certain that the direction that we're going with coal-bed methane development is necessary at this time. I think we should proceed but proceed with caution.

In regard to Bill 24 it would be responsible only if we were to bring on over time, in an environmentally safe way, significant amounts of coal-bed methane, which, hopefully, we will collect a significant amount of royalty on. So whenever the minister is talking about increasing the amount of nonrenewable resource revenue that can be used for budget purposes, from \$4.75 billion to \$5.3 billion, well, that nonrenewable resource revenue will be coming in the future from coal-bed methane production.

Now, with those comments, Mr. Speaker, I would caution all hon. members about this bill, and again we have to remind ourselves about the words "thrifty" and "Tory" and the fact that in the last five or six years the dramatic increase in government spending, the size of government, there hasn't been a dramatic reduction in the problems, whether the problems are in public health care, public education, or in improving our infrastructure. The budget has increased dramatically, but again the fundamental question that taxpayers ask is: where is the money going when we still seem to have crowded classrooms, when we still seem to have the prospect of teacher layoffs at the end of the school year, when we have emergency rooms that are overcrowded, people are waiting eight, 10, 12 hours sometimes, and when we have roads and bridges that certainly need a lot of work that has been overlooked in past decade? So we have to be cognizant of that.

Thank you.

Hon. Members: Question.

The Speaker: The question has been called. Should we proceed with calling?

[Motion carried; Bill 24 read a third time]

Bill 16 Peace Officer Act

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

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to stand and move third reading of Bill 16, the Peace Officer Act.

We have had extensive discussion on this bill in second and in committee. I would ask for support again in third.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, this is one of those particular bills that could be good or bad, depending on how we use it. I know that the Solicitor General talked about this when

I was here – I believe it was in second reading. You know, we've had peace officers for many years, and he's absolutely right about that, but I think we're seeing differences here now.

Part of, if you like, the overheated economy, the best in the universe, or whatever the government says, is that we are facing some serious problems, perhaps in abundance, more than we have in the past. Crime rates are up, and this comes with an overheated economy. There's no doubt about that. It can also come from another direction: when you have poverty. We know that crime is fairly rampant. Whether we can hire enough police, I think we can still do more. We've advocated that, especially community policing.

I still can't get a handle on whether the hiring of these peace officers is complementary – and I suppose that would be good – or if we're looking for a cheaper fix here. They've raised this in second reading, that we are putting out people that perhaps aren't as well trained as they should be rather than paying a little more for the police that we actually need. Then I tie that to the most recent revelations about the Guardian Angels coming to Alberta to solve our problems and the minister not endorsing it but not rejecting it either. So I don't know where we're going with all this. As I say, I'm not exercised enough that I think that hiring these peace officers could be helpful, but I would suggest that the problems are probably more than this bill is going to solve. If it's a complementary piece of legislation and it's going to be used that way, fine. But if, as I said, we're looking at this as sort of being a cheaper version, trying to solve some serious problems by doing it cheaper, then that creates some very serious problems for me.

Mr. Speaker, I think that we have to relook at our whole policing situation, how this fits in. With the economy – and I'm speaking of Edmonton, but we hear of the problems in Fort McMurray, Grande Prairie, wherever the economy is booming. Calgary, I know, is facing increased crime problems. The mayor has alluded to that, and I think he endorsed the Guardian Angels, which I was a little surprised about because that could create more problems. I think that it comes down to – and I think the minister and I would agree – the best way we can deal with it is to have enough well-trained police out there working with the community groups themselves as much as possible, participating.

I've said at community associations that the police can't solve all the problems. It takes the public working with the police. You see, my problem here is that I just don't know how this all fits into the whole policing structure. As I said, it's not enough for me to vote against it, but at some point I would like from the minister or the member or whatever some more clarification about where we are going, especially in view of the most recent discussion about the Guardian Angels. Even at their best that creates some other problems, and I don't think that's the way to go. Certainly, the police forces that I've talked to don't believe that it's the way to go.

Where does this fit in the whole policing structure? Where are the preventative programs that we've talked about to deal with the problems of crime in the overheated economy and prevention and what's happening? Again, I don't expect the member to have all the answers to these, but that's my basic concern about the bill. I'm not sure exactly how it fits into the total picture.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

4:50

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

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise again and speak in third reading of Bill 16, Peace Officer Act. The main objective of this bill is to bring all peace officers, previously known as special constables, under one piece of legislation that will clarify their roles and responsibilities, increase accountability, and strengthen provincial standards for training, use of force, and qualifications.

My comment, Mr. Speaker, is that I think that there's a role for special constables to play in a complementary role to traditional police services, whether that is a foot patrol presence in communities responding to minor calls for investigating purposes – vehicle break-ins, accidents, whatever – or other such roles, but to put them into situations that are extremely dangerous without full training is dangerous.

Traffic stops are extremely dangerous, Mr. Speaker. The police spend hours in scenario training on just this one aspect of police duties. The question has to be: do these special constables going out onto highway 63 have the same training? Have they completed the same scenario training that regular police officers have? These are my comments. If they haven't, they are being put in harm's way, and that is unacceptable to me and unacceptable to many people in Alberta. Additional traffic enforcement on highway 63 is absolutely needed, but let's get real here. We need police officers with full training out there, not special constables who haven't received the same level of training. The minister should put more money into front-line policing services if he wants to get serious about traffic safety. This method is putting these special constables in harm's way, and that is unacceptable.

What level of authority will these special constables have? Can they just enforce provincial traffic laws, or are they going to have full Criminal Code powers? Have they been trained in all the policies and procedures dealing with the traffic laws? Do they fully understand the law and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, as police officers are trained to do? Have they undergone the same level of firearms training that police officers do normally? Have they undergone the same level of training in the use of the baton and the pepper spray, and have they received the same hand-to-hand training that regular police officers have? Without the same level of training, the safety of the special constables and the public is at risk.

We are also very concerned that this bill leaves most of the details to the regulations. All of these details, Mr. Speaker, such as conditions of employment that must be met, qualifications, performance, standards of conduct, training, duties, and discipline, all of these crucial areas are left to the minister to make through regulation. In other words, we have no idea what training will be provided, how much it will cost, what standards an employer will use to hire a peace officer, and who may carry a sidearm. There is far too much ambiguity and not enough substance.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that this is a good bill. I mean, there still needs to be some clarification on it, but we are in third reading, and I don't know whether corrections have been made during the committee stage. That's all I have to say. Thank you very much.

Hon. Members: Question.

The Speaker: Question has been called, so I'd call on the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays to close the debate or call the question.

Mr. Johnston: Call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 16 read a third time]

Bill 21

Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped Act

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Lougheed: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to rise and move Bill 21, the Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped Act, or the AISH Act, for third reading.

As discussed, this new act will continue our renewal of the AISH program and create a more flexible and responsive program that will

better meet the unique needs of Albertans with severe disabilities. I'd like to briefly highlight the proposed changes again for my colleagues and what those changes will mean for the clients.

Mr. Speaker, this act will make the reporting and appeals processes more adaptive to client needs. Reporting income based on individual situations will make the reporting process easier for AISH clients and will also reduce paperwork, administrative error, and the occurrence of overpayments and underpayments. The act will also help ensure that clients have the opportunity to appeal an overpayment before a debt is assessed and collection action is taken. If clients feel they haven't received due process, they will still be able to take the matter to court.

To answer a question raised in Committee of the Whole, clients will have the opportunity to appeal most decisions of a director. An example of a decision that may not be appealed will be the rates at which the personal income supports benefits are provided. In this case, the client can appeal the eligibility but not the rate of the benefit. Another example would be the provision of additional health benefits not normally provided under the various health plans.

This legislation will also allow the program to take into account special or exceptional circumstances and, if appropriate, exempt the client from repaying the amount they were overpaid. In passing Bill 21, the government can also update the language of the act and consolidate legislative provisions related to the AISH program under one ministry.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, Bill 21 will allow us to provide health benefits on a limited basis to those people with disabilities who because of their income are not eligible to receive AISH. This legislation also increases flexibility by allowing AISH clients to request that the program pay third parties directly on their behalf for things like rent or continuing-care accommodation fees. That's another example of how the renewed program will be more responsive to the individual needs of the clients. Likewise, as was mentioned before, moving some of the provisions to regulation will help the program remain flexible and responsive to the needs of its clients now and into the future.

I'd like to take a moment to address one other issue raised in Committee of the Whole. A well-established process is in place under the AISH program to determine whether a person meets the definition of severe handicap of mental or physical functioning. Medical eligibility is not solely based on an applicant's medical condition. It's also based on the person's current and future ability to earn a living through working. AISH administrators use information obtained on AISH application forms and medical reports to determine eligibility. They also have medical consultants available to assist them in analyzing complex cases.

Mr. Speaker, in conclusion, I'd like to thank you for the opportunity to speak today to Bill 21, the Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped Act. This legislation truly will create a more flexible and responsive program that will be able to adapt and better meet the needs of clients. I'd encourage all members to support this legislation.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, it's a pleasure to get a chance to participate in the debate on Bill 21, the Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped Act, this afternoon at third reading. Now, there have been attempts in the past to amend this legislation. Certainly, when we listen to the hon. Member for Strathcona, I think all is meant well with this bill, but when we look at some of the past practices of this government and how they treat the citizens of Alberta in the AISH community, it's not a stellar record. The treatment of these citizens, a group of citizens who we

must treat with decency and respect, has been, unfortunately, very bad.

5:00

Before I go any further, Mr. Speaker, I think it's time that we acknowledge the contribution of the citizens of Alberta who are recipients of the AISH program. We have to recognize Edmonton lawyer Mr. Philip Tinkler, who filed the class action lawsuit in September 2004 on behalf of two recipients of the provincial assured income for the severely handicapped program. The two men argued that they were underpaid by the program or subject to an illegal and abusive debt collection process. For this government to pick on these citizens in this way is wrong. I can't believe that this government would do that.

This government went out of their way previously, seven years before this lawsuit was filed, and retired an entire loan for Millar Western when Mr. Stockwell Day was the Provincial Treasurer. Retired the loan just like that. There have been other loan guarantees that have been given and relaxed and in some cases retired entirely. But what do we do? Oh, no. We're going to squeeze every dime out of the disenfranchised and the unfortunate, the disabled. We should be ashamed of ourselves. We should be ashamed of ourselves, and we should be ashamed of ourselves that we're not indexing the monthly income for the assured income for the severely handicapped.

Now, hon. members of this House went on at length in committee whenever we tried to change that. We all have our salaries, each and every one of us, linked to one index or another. So if it's good enough for us, how come it's not good enough for the AISH community? Why should they have to go begging to this government? Maybe you like that. Maybe it makes you feel powerful. I don't know. But I don't think people should have to do that.

That's why in committee we had suggested that there's a better way of doing this, and that was to ensure that if there was a significant increase in the cost of living or if there were other factors – rental rates, energy costs, you name it – there would be an automatic increase in the monthly amounts that these individuals get under the program. But, no. It was seen fit by this Conservative government: oh, no, we can't do that. The thoroughbred horse racing renewal? Well, every budget year we can increase that amount by millions and millions and millions of dollars. But the AISH clients? Well, they have to go to court.

Fortunately, they won their legal case, and hopefully they'll never have to go to court again with this government. But I'm asking this government: when we consider the needs of the AISH community, we consider that every little bit that they get helps. They're very good managers of their monthly income. I've met with many different individuals in that community, and I'm amazed at how they get by. Maybe they should be giving the Minister of Finance budgeting advice because they know how to manage on very small amounts.

Maybe they do have some tips not only for the Minister of Finance but for the entire government caucus. There will be trips taken by this government. Economic Development itself would spend more money on some luncheons on some foreign city than these AISH clients would spend in a month. If we were to look, for instance, at the Economic Development hosting expenses for even a six-month period – and these would be amounts exceeding \$600 – and we were to show any member in the AISH community just exactly what this government was doing and where and in what restaurants or with whom, they would be very, very disappointed. They would be very, very disappointed that this is the same government that said, no, we can't have any sort of barometer that would link their benefit schedule to increases in cost of living.

We seem to have a set of rules here for ourselves, and we have a set of rules for the disabled. I think that's wrong, I think it is unfortunate, I think it is misguided, and it's reflective of a government that's out of touch, completely out of touch. I would urge the government to reconsider and, in your dealings with the AISH community, please recognize that they have every right to live in dignity and in respect. They shouldn't have to go beholden to this government with their caps in their hands. Programs should be well financed, and they and their families should know that the money will be there.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Cardinal: Make it quick.

Mr. Martin: Thank you. He says "make it quick." Where are you going?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just a few comments. Maybe not quite as quick as the hon. minister would like, but I will make them anyhow. The bill, like so many bills, obviously has some good parts to it. Who is going to argue with, I think it's section (4)(a), that there'll be some discretion regarding allowing persons whose financial resources exceed AISH's allowed limit but who have high medical costs to benefit from eligibility for an AISH health benefit card? I mean, nobody is going to argue against that. It makes sense.

I would also argue and maybe throw out that I've been told that some people, even if they had help with such things that we used to have like bus passes, might be more employable if they could get around. I would hope the government might take a look at that as an area that could be added to something like this on the bill.

But, you know, Mr. Speaker, the reality is that the government, I think, was embarrassed from the last election. I'm not saying that it was this member that did it, but certainly it became an election issue, and thankfully there are at least some improvements with the most recent raises in the wage and the fact that even this is a step in the right direction. There's some discretion with high medical costs.

But I would say to the member and say to the Legislature that these people are not in the lap of luxury. This is very, very difficult. I wonder how many people here could live on roughly a thousand dollars a month. That's the reality. It's better than it was, but if we look at the reality – and I've said this, and the member knows this – when you take inflation into account, these people are not as well off as they were back in 1991. That's the reality. I could have accepted this if they would have said: "Okay. This is the reality where we're going to be now, but we will put" – and the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar was talking about it – "the indexation on their benefits." What indexation level you use is debatable, but we could at least do it. We've advocated that and advocated that.

5:10

I know that the member and the minister have said, "Well, we'll review it," I believe in a couple of years. Correct me if I'm wrong. But, I mean, this member may not be there. It could be somebody else. It could drag on, Mr. Speaker, another seven years, and these people could fall further and further behind. As I say, they're not up to where they were in 1991. I do not honestly understand. I do not understand why we cannot bring in some sort of an indexation for the most vulnerable people in society. Nobody has given me an indication yet why we do not do that. The Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar mentioned that we do an indexation here, some sort of indexation so that we don't fall behind inflation. If it works here and it works in other areas, why for the life of us can't we do that?

Now, as I say, the bill doesn't refer to that immediately, but some of the realities are that they must recognize that there are some problems because they want some more discretion to be able to deal with people, and they talked about high medical costs. They have made some improvements to the benefits, admittedly. I'll give the government credit. That's at least a step in the right direction. But we've got a long ways to go yet, Mr. Speaker. A long ways to go.

You know, they say that the mark of a civilized society is how we treat the most vulnerable in that society, and I say to the members opposite that we have a long way to go to become a civilized society because we can do much better than we are with this particular bill.

Again, Mr. Speaker, there are some steps that make it a little better for some people. Hopefully, the minister would use that discretion in a generous way now that she has that discretion and that we might be bringing cases forward, as other MLAs might be too, when this occurs. I would suggest that with the indexation, we will keep haranguing the government until they do the right thing on that, but I also want to throw out the idea of some other things, like bus passes. That could be very valuable, because if you can't get to another job, how do you be productive and working? A simple thing like that. I'm told that we used to have that here in the Legislature at one time, but I haven't had time to research it, we're just getting letters about it. I think that even the hon. minister might be prepared to look at something like that. That's people helping themselves. That could be an immense help, just like we're dealing with in this bill in terms of medical benefits.

So I would hope the government would take that as constructive criticism and at least look at that. But let's not wait two years till we have another review, or seven or 10 or 12. Let's move in the next budget year at least and do something about the indexation and get these people up to some sort of level where they can live.

I just say to people: think about yourselves. Think about yourselves. It could be any one of us that could end up on AISH for whatever reason. How would you like to live on a thousand dollars a month? How would you like to do that?

Mr. Cardinal: It could be tomorrow.

Mr. Martin: Yeah. Well, that could be anybody tomorrow. Exactly, hon. member. It could be any one of us. Then all of a sudden we're having to live on a thousand dollars, you know. It's just unbelievable that we can't afford to do better.

Anyhow, thank you for the opportunity, Mr. Speaker, to speak to third reading on this bill.

The Speaker: Additional speakers?

Shall I call on the hon. Member for Strathcona to close the debate?

Mr. Lougheed: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 21 read a third time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to all members for their valuable contributions today. It has indeed been a very exhilarating and great Alberta day. On that note, I would move that we now call it 5:30, in view of what the hour actually is, and resume sitting on Monday at 1:30 p.m.

[Motion carried; at 5:15 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]

