

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, April 28, 2003**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 2003/04/28

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Please be seated.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Mr. Hutton: Mr. Speaker, thank you. I rise at the earliest moment as a courtesy. Pursuant to Standing Order 15 I am giving notice that I wish to raise a point of privilege tomorrow on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: **Motions Other than Government Motions**

Disposal of Public Lands

507. Mr. Broda moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to sell or dispose of lands that are declared surplus to the needs of the province.

[Debate adjourned April 14: Mr. Strang speaking]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Dunvegan.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise and join the debate on Motion 507 regarding the disposal of Alberta's surplus public lands sponsored by the hon. Member for Redwater. Motion 507 is designed to urge the government of Alberta to sell or dispose of any public lands which the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development deems could be better utilized by the private sector, especially those public lands situated in the white areas.

Lands for potential sale include grazing lands under lease, vacant lands, or lands that are currently not being utilized to their full economic potential. By encouraging the sale of such lands, Motion 507 aims to encourage the consolidation of farmlands, increase land development, and increase the generation of tax revenue by the province and municipalities. In my constituency of Dunvegan I have many parcels of land that are public lands, yet the majority of the neighbours are unaware that these are public lands. Most feel that these quarters or sections are in fact already private lands.

On March 26, 1997, the government appointed the Agricultural Lease Review Committee to conduct a review of public land policies in the agricultural land and multiple use areas, which are also known as the white areas. The main attempt of the review was to examine the public's viewpoint on current land management policies and to develop actions to resolve several long-standing issues regarding public land management. When the committee's report was released in 1998, Mr. Speaker, it outlined that Albertans were generally in favour of continued use and conservation of public lands under provincial ownership. However, the report did note that Albertans were generally in agreement with disposing of agricultural lands situated in the white areas if the lands are being cultivated, if no conservation reasons exist to preclude the sale, if the existing disposition holder agrees to the sale, and if fragmented or fractional pieces of public land are too small to provide a conservation value and are inefficient to manage. If the land was under lease, the general consensus was that the existing disposition holder must agree to the cancellation of the disposition before the land was to be sold.

On April 1, 1999, the government of Alberta introduced Bill 31, the Agricultural Disposition Statutes Amendment Act, to the Alberta Legislature. The bill was designed to implement the provisions of

the Agricultural Lease Review Committee report by striking a balance between the interests of leaseholders, industry, recreational users, and the people of Alberta, who own the land. The bill was passed in the House on May 18, 1999. [interjections]

The Speaker: There's a group of hon. members along with the deputy whip that I would ask the deputy whip to encourage some degree of decorum in the House among his colleagues.

Please continue, hon. member.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. However, it was never proclaimed and thus never became law. As a result, the provisions outlined in the agricultural lease review were never implemented.

The current policy of the Department of Sustainable Resource Development regarding public land sales is to balance the need related to economic growth with the Alberta public's long-term interests. However, the department does sell public lands situated in the white areas in order to facilitate agricultural expansion and certain types of commercial, industrial, and recreational uses, thereby supporting the growth of the provincial economy, to provide land for essential services like public works projects or community and institutional needs that benefit Albertans, and they do that if they are not needed to meet the government's resource management commitments or for other government programs.

Mr. Speaker, public lands are sold by two different methods, public land sales and private land sales. Public land sales are administered by a public auction that takes place when a particular parcel of public land is vacant or has been released from a disposition by the disposition holder. When land is sold via auction, the appraisal process is used in order to determine the set price. Private land sales take place without public competition and are administered when leaseholders have the option to purchase the land, leaseholders hold a miscellaneous or recreational lease for the purpose of a commercial recreational development, and land under lease has been already developed by the leaseholder. When land is sold via private land sales, the land price is based on its actual market value.

Overall sales of public lands in Alberta have been at a steady decrease. For example, in 1997-1998 there were 126 sales involving 13,800 acres of public lands, while in 2001-2002 there were only 48 sales involving 6,000 acres. Sale or disposal of Alberta's surplus public lands would lead to increased land productivity, consolidation of existing private farming operations, increased development of the land, and increased tax revenue. By selling or disposing of surplus public lands, the government of Alberta would also free up valuable resources, which could be used for other more important priorities such as health and education.

Mr. Speaker, there is a risk that the sale of public lands, specifically the agricultural grazing lands, would encourage overgrazing. This could happen due to the fact that the government would no longer have the jurisdiction over public land that it has sold. There is a chance that Motion 507 could face strong opposition from current leaseholders as many of them would not be able to come up with the necessary funds to purchase the land. Motion 507 may also face close scrutiny from the general public as the public is commonly opposed to the widespread sale of public lands. Many Albertans feel that when public lands are sold to a private operator, those lands lose their value to the province as a whole. However, I still contend that when public lands are created as private lands, if they look like private lands and are managed like private lands would be, then that land should be disposed of and the resources used elsewhere to benefit all Albertans.

I would encourage everyone to support the hon. Member for Redwater on his Motion 507. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to speak to Motion 507, which in its amended form I believe now reads: "Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to sell or dispose of public lands that do not possess any economic potential for the province." This is one of those interesting proposals that you see brought forward in this Assembly from to time and which you think: well, on the face of it I suppose it doesn't sound that awful; perhaps it's harmless. But the more you look at it, the more you think: hmm, this is opening what could be a great big Pandora's box. And who knows? The truth probably lies somewhere in between those two.

Just in looking at what's being proposed and listening to the member who spoke previous to me and considering this a little bit as I went about my business today, a couple of things occur to me, and it's one of those where I pose three questions to myself. Is there a problem right now? Is there an immediate, glaring, urgent problem right now in the province of Alberta with public lands that "do not possess any economic potential for the province"? I'd have to say: not that I've noticed. I haven't seen any front-page headlines. No protests; no marches. I'm not getting a lot of e-mails or letters on the urgency of the public lands and a great need to do something about them, so I don't know that there's any crying need. Well, if there was a need – and I think we can agree that there wasn't – would a motion fix it, and more specifically would this motion or the resulting action coming out of it fix whatever is the problem before us today? I don't know that it would fix the problem for us today, if the problem is essentially that there are little bits and tags around, funny little pieces of land, which is how the sponsoring member first explained it to me, you know, just a little kind of inconvenience, a little bit of a right-of-way or a little tag of land that gets cut off when roads get put into place, and it would just be easier if we could sell that little bit to the closest neighbour.

8:10

Who would be benefiting from that? Well, one presumes the closest neighbour who gets to buy that little bit of land. But this motion doesn't actually spell out that we're talking about those sorts of little funny tag ends and oddly positioned bits of land. It doesn't say that. It talks about public land, and when we're talking about public land – well, this will tell you something about my age – I think of it as Crown land that's administered under the Public Lands Act of Alberta. We have the white areas, the green areas. Then, of course, there are the protected areas, which are the national parks or the areas that are already set aside in things like the eastern slopes policy. So the motion hasn't said specifically that it's talking about these little odds and ends. It just says public lands.

Well, that opens the door for all kinds of things like the selling of general Crown land, either the white land or in the green area, and as the member prior to me said, the public does not like that idea. They like the idea of Crown land that's there and kept for future generations, so I think there would be some resistance to selling that off. I think there's also the potential here for selling off parks because it could be argued probably by someone – I'm sure there's a silver-tongued speaker out there – that could put up a good argument that there's no economic potential for parkland or perhaps no economic potential for recreational land. I mean, people just go there and ride their snowmobiles or their horses or walk or whatever, so there's no economic potential for that land unless there was some sort of trail permit system developed, and that's still not going to generate enormous sums of money.

Grazing leases, though – and this is where we start to wander into

the, hmm, isn't-that-interesting place. Well, now, this motion is too large. Having gone from talking about little tiny odds and ends, we're now talking about potentially large tracts of land, particularly when you wander in and start talking about grazing leases, and none of this is clearly defined. I often have problems with motions because they are too loose. They're just not specific as to what we're talking about.

So when I'm asked to speak either for myself or on behalf of my constituents in Edmonton-Centre, it's very difficult to do so. Would constituents in Edmonton-Centre mind selling off funny little odds and ends, you know, a couple hundred square metres, the result of various roads going through, right-of-ways and things? No, probably not. But would they object to land being sold that's potentially recreational land or parkland or Crown land in Alberta? Yes, very much they would object to that. They want that land held, and they don't want it sliced up and sold to private users where the rest of the citizens of the province can't get access to it.

A perfect example of that is the struggles that we've had in Alberta trying to put in place the Alberta Trailnet system, which is the Alberta extension of the Trans Canada Trail. Because we didn't start off here by taking the unused or no longer used railway lines for our trail system, we're having a much harder time pegging together that trail and linking it, and a number of times we're having to cross over or make agreements to cross over and make use of private land. Potentially, this motion going through makes that kind of a scheme or a future trail even more difficult if we're having to patchwork through a number of other private owners of little bits of land or larger bits of land. It's very interesting that if you're selling a land that doesn't possess any economic potential, in the very act of selling it you've now given it economic potential. So there's an odd little sort of marketing economic glitch that you get into there.

The Speaker: Excuse me, hon. member. I think your time now has evaporated.

I will now call on the hon. Member for Redwater to conclude debate on this motion.

Mr. Broda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've had several calls after introducing this motion, Motion 507. I want to make it clear that this is only a motion. It's not a bill, as it has been referred to by some of the people that have phoned. It's urging the government to look at disposal of some of our public lands which the hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development deems could be utilized better by the private sector. Let's make it clear that this does not mean large tracts of grazing leases. An example may be where somebody may have deeded land that's surrounding some public land that might be right in the middle of deeded land, and we have to administer it. Once or twice or three times a year somebody has to go out there and review it, and we have to look at it. If there is economic potential, well, then we don't dispose of it, but it gives the minister the right to go out there and have a look. As the Member for Dunvegan in his speaking as well indicated, surplus public lands could be parcels or grazing lands under lease, vacant lands, and lands that are currently not being utilized to their fullest economic potential.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I'm not referring to valuable forest lands, areas with historic natural grasslands, lands which have reserves for conservation, or even, as mentioned by the Member for Edmonton-Centre, the potential of parklands being sold. I don't think that's what we're referring to. We're just saying: let's review our policies; let's look at the administrative costs of smaller parcels. I've got some in my own constituency where my constituents have asked: why can't I buy it? Going back and checking out: well, we can't

because it's set out in regulation that you can't dispose of it. It might be a 28-acre parcel like in this one situation where a road crosscuts it through, but it's also a fence line where there are trees already in there. So the fellow is saying: I'm leasing that little 28-acre chunk of land, but I have to take my equipment to go around the road to farm it. The rest of the land, of course, is reserve; leave it be so. But we have to look and see how we can address some of those issues.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to just say that this is what the motion is there for: to have the minister of sustainable resources review some of our policies. Certainly, I personally wouldn't want to see large tracts of land sold off either, but I think we have to look at: what are the administrative costs? Does it make economic sense to let the landowner that's leasing it have it or buy it? I'm not saying: let's give it a fire sale. Let's put it on fair market value. It doesn't mean even that that individual farmer might be the one buying it. That's open to the public, whether it be by public auction or by market value through real estate. I think we've sold other lands here which maybe the highways department had already some buildings on site. We've disposed of it because there was no need for it, or in this case maybe the municipality could utilize it more efficiently.

So this is what Motion 507 is all about, Mr. Speaker, and I urge everybody of the Assembly to vote for Motion 507. Thank you.

[The voice vote indicated that Motion Other than Government Motion 507 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 8:19 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

For the motion:

Abbott	Griffiths	O'Neill
Boutilier	Hlady	Pham
Broda	Horner	Snelgrove
Calahasen	Hutton	Stelmach
Cenaiko	Johnson	Strang
DeLong	Kryczka	Tarchuk
Doerksen	Magnus	Taylor
Ducharme	Marz	VanderBurg
Dunford	McClelland	Woloshyn
Evans	Melchin	Yankowsky
Goudreau	Oberg	Zwozdesky

8:30

Against the motion:

Blakeman	Carlson	Taft
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Totals:	For – 33	Against – 3
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[Motion Other than Government Motion 507 carried]

Organized Crime and Terrorism

508. Mr. Cenaiko moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to work with Criminal Intelligence Service Alberta to enhance collaborative partnerships and co-ordinated programs with various levels of government, policing agencies, and the public to effectively combat organized crime and terrorism.

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

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour and pleasure to begin debate on Motion 508. The purpose of Motion 508 is to encourage this government to continue working with Criminal Intelligence Service Alberta. I believe that it is important to continue existing projects and develop new ways to battle organized gangs and serious crime in Alberta. It's been said that crime used to be based only on brutal, solitary, and personal impulses, but more criminals are forming ranks. They are disciplined. They have given themselves a code and a morality, and they work in gangs with well-devised schemes.

Before I explain the need for CISA, I would like to highlight several important tasks that Criminal Intelligence Service Alberta provides for police services. First of all, training sessions are planned and provided to teach police officers about new technology and crime trends. With the emergence of serious crime the expectations on law enforcement have increased dramatically. Criminal Intelligence Service researches new techniques for battling terrorism and organized crime. Alberta's police services can learn a great deal about crime-fighting techniques and strategies from other jurisdictions. Criminals have become more mobile, which has increased the need to share information about organized crime.

Second, there are joint force operations targeted at the numerous organized crime operations throughout Alberta. These joint force operations have resulted in the arrest and conviction of dozens of dangerous criminals. Obviously, the benefit from these operations is the removal of dangerous people from Alberta's communities. However, they also help break up large and powerful criminal networks.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, CISA helps police officers track down suspects involved in major criminal activities.

No single government agency or police service can keep up with the growing size and threat of organized crime. All three levels of government work together to reduce the chances of serious crime and make communities safer for all Albertans. In total, Mr. Speaker, there are 27 organizations with membership in CISA, including law enforcement agencies and other federal and provincial government departments that have an intelligence or enforcement component. On their own these member organizations successfully carry out their own day-to-day activities. However, combining all of their unique knowledge, wisdom, and experience into one body creates an awesome tool to help police services battle and defeat organized crime. Governance of this association is provided by an executive committee consisting of chiefs of police from the Calgary, Edmonton, Lethbridge, and Medicine Hat police services as well as the commanding officer of the RCMP K Division.

I would like to stress that CISA is part of a national intelligence infrastructure and does not provide law enforcement. CISA is part of a national system of provincial bureaus that operates under the umbrella of Criminal Intelligence Service Canada, which also provides access to Interpol and other international enforcement and intelligence agencies.

Mr. Speaker, there are two other government agencies that include counterterrorism and national security as part of their mandate similar to CISA. For example, the Canadian Security Intelligence Service is responsible for protecting the national security interests of Canada and safeguarding its citizens. The national security investigation section of the RCMP has the primary jurisdiction for investigating offences related to national security. It is not the intention of this motion or CISA to infringe on the existing mandates of those two organizations. One of the goals of CISA is to build on the work already being done by these agencies along with the other 27 members to provide a clear picture of what criminals are planning in Alberta. It only makes sense to use the intelligence-sharing

contacts that are already in place. Better sharing of this broader body of crime-related intelligence should significantly improve the capacity of police officers to protect the public.

All of the partners in CISA understand the need to provide and maintain safe communities, but they also appreciate that this is something that cannot be accomplished in isolation. One of the greatest weapons in the battle against organized crime is an informed public. Albertans need to know that CISA exists and that there is a great deal of work being done to preserve the safety of Albertans. Informing the public about CISA will at the very least offer peace of mind for those concerned about the threat of serious crime and terrorism in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, as we all know, Alberta is a growing province. As our economy expands and diversifies, so too does Alberta's population. The upside to growth is an influx of more people from different backgrounds, experience, and skills. However, one of the major downsides to growth is the increased prevalence of crime. There are more homes to break into, more people to terrorize, and more children to exploit. These are the growing pains of an expanding economy, and they must be addressed. The question for law enforcement is: how do we solve these problems effectively? How do we know which businesses are owned and operated by organized gangs? What technology are criminals using to outmanoeuvre the average police officer? Where are organized gangs operating? Are they higher in number in Edmonton or in Calgary? Are they in smaller urban centres such as Red Deer, Fort McMurray, or Lethbridge? There are hundreds of dangerous people in this province who have and will break the law. The problem for law enforcement is that criminals are getting smarter, methodical, and more sophisticated.

Although traditional crime rates in Alberta remain fairly consistent, criminals remain active in other ways. Criminals, especially organized crime members, carefully plot their moves and plan their attacks. There are several very large and very dangerous organized crime gangs operating throughout Alberta. Results from CISA investigations have revealed aboriginal, Asian, and outlaw motorcycle gangs as the three main criminal organizations in Alberta. Realistically, police officers on their own cannot compete with the size and sophistication of these organized gangs. There is a great deal that remains unknown about the scope and influence of organized crime in Alberta's communities. However, information sharing with different levels of government, police services, and the RCMP helps preserve peace and thwart criminal activity.

Mr. Speaker, since September 11, 2001, concern for potential terrorist activities throughout North America and specifically Alberta has been on the minds of all of us. However, there is work being done to ensure that we are not attacked by terrorists or organized crime. One of the most critical factors to prevent serious criminal activity is sharing information and intelligence. Information is scattered bits of raw data. Intelligence, on the other hand, is information that has been put through the process of collection, evaluation, analysis, dissemination, and re-evaluation. Relevant, credible information plus quality analysis equals useful intelligence. CISA assists the exchange of criminal intelligence.

Currently Alberta and Ontario are the only two provinces that provide provincial funding to their respective criminal intelligence agencies. I believe it's important to recognize the success of their work and pursue more projects with Criminal Intelligence Service Alberta, the RCMP, and with the Calgary and Edmonton police services. This agency has had success establishing profile, gaining exposure, and creating legitimacy among other law enforcement bodies. However, few Albertans know about CISA, and I believe that there is a need to create a much higher public profile for this organization.

8:40

Mr. Speaker, several barriers including time, finances, and human resources prevent CISA from getting a clear understanding of the known criminal networks operating in Alberta. There is more work to be done, and it's vital that the government of Alberta build on the partnership with CISA. I was fortunate to have spent nearly five years of my life working with dedicated and committed individuals who are sincere and passionate about the work they do. Working hand in hand with members of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service and Criminal Intelligence Service Alberta was an incredible honour for me and a part of my life I will never forget. They have sacrificed their lives and extended periods of time from their families to help preserve our safe and democratic and free society. The potential threat to the people and critical infrastructure of Alberta represents a public risk that is shared by all Albertans. I encourage all members of this Assembly to urge the Alberta government to work harder and commit more time and funding for criminal intelligence efforts.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I listened carefully to what the Member for Calgary-Buffalo was saying. I was trying to figure out why he brought this motion forward. In the last few sentences that became a little clearer to me. He's in fact worked with the organization that is the centre theme of the motion here. I can't speak to the work that the member did before he was elected here, but certainly he's made every effort while he has been in this Assembly to remain true to his roots, but once again I'm looking at a motion that does not seem to reflect what the proposing member actually has in mind. The motion that is on the books urges the government to

work with Criminal Intelligence Service Alberta to enhance collaborative partnerships and co-ordinated programs with various levels of government, policing agencies, and the public to effectively combat organized crime and terrorism.

As I listened to the member, I heard him talk about committing more time and funding to fight organized crime, creating a higher public profile for CISA, and a number of other activities that the member seemed to be contemplating would be fulfilled through this motion but in fact are not reflected in the motion. So the lack of specificity continues to be a problem with the motions that I see private members of the government bring forward.

I was looking to see what is the point of this. Why are we talking about it? From what I can see and indeed from the opening introductory sentences of the sponsoring member, this seems to be, "We want to keep on doing what we're doing," and that seems to be the motion that was brought before us, which strikes me as a bit odd. So once again I have to default to my question. Is there a problem here? Yes. I think it can be argued that we do have a problem with increasing levels of activity in organized crime, and now we have this overlaid with concerns about national or international terrorism activities. I didn't hear it argued, but I think that it could be argued that there is a problem right now. Okay. Then is government activity that is contemplated in a motion going to address that need? Well, I guess it could if it was laid out, but I didn't hear it laid out in what the member wanted this particular organization to do by way of activity that would be addressing whatever is the problem and, specific to this motion, laying out what he wished to have addressed.

We have a motion that says: same old, same old; let's keep doing the same thing. I don't understand what the urgency is in that motion or what the member was looking to accomplish in bringing

that motion before this House. Just keep doing what you're doing: I think that could be put towards a number of departments, but that's not making us any safer here or making Alberta more prosperous or any number of other activities.

Let me take a different tack on this. If we're really looking to address the issues particularly around youth recruitment into organized crime, into gangs in other words, then I think there's a fair amount of stock, of proof that's out there, studies that have been done, statistics that show for younger people particularly that the threat of more punishment does not work. It does not stop youth organized crime, youth gang activity. They are young. They are immortal. It's not going to happen to them. So threats of additional sanctions of some kind, which perhaps might be contemplated by the wording of this motion, don't help these kids in organized crime. It doesn't reduce it. If you really want to reduce youth activity in organized crime, get them involved doing something else.

You know, we can look to our neighbours to the south, where they have had terrible problems with youth gangs, and look to dedicate resources. That's where they have found they can be effective. They provide enough activities for young people to get involved in, and they get involved in it, and that does keep them out of those organized gangs. That is the best solution that they've found, and it's by no means perfect either. If what's being contemplated here is less youth involvement in crime, then this motion is not addressing where that needs to go.

My second issue around counterintelligence and policing and organized crime and terrorism is the ability to measure this. Recently I've been in the position to question the Solicitor General in Public Accounts and then again two weeks ago in the budget debates, and every time we come around to this issue of counterintelligence, of gangs, of organized crime, and of terrorism, the Solicitor General is regrettably unable to give me any information because, well, it's secret. They are specialized units. She can't tell us what's being planned. She can't tell us what's being measured. She can't tell us if it's successful or unsuccessful because that would be giving it all away. But at a certain point on behalf of Albertans you've got to say: how are you measuring this? Otherwise, what are you spending money for? How do you know what you're actually getting if you have no way of measuring it because it's all secret and behind closed doors? How do we assure Albertans that they are in fact getting value for the money that they're spending on whatever these activities are?

I'll take my place and listen to other members who hopefully will be able to support the proposing member and elucidate on what exactly is being contemplated aside from "Let's keep doing the same thing we've been doing," which is what this motion says. I know that my colleague for Edmonton-Ellerslie has some additional information that she would like to bring up, and as well she's got more experience with youth crime in her area, that I'm sure she wants to talk about in connection with this particular motion.

Thank you for the opportunity, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and speak on Motion 508 this evening. I'd like to begin by thanking the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo for bringing forward this motion and for his continued efforts to see increased support for Criminal Intelligence Service Alberta, which works to make Alberta a safer and more secure place to live.

For members who do not know, Criminal Intelligence Service Alberta, or CISA, is an organization that exists to facilitate the exchange of criminal intelligence between intelligence units and

enforcement units. Motion 508 serves to highlight the important work that they do and encourage the government to continue to provide support. CISA exists as a centre of excellence to support the efforts of law enforcement and government in the battle against organized crime. CISA is also responsible for implementing the Alberta government's provincial strategy for organized crime and serious crime. To accomplish this, CISA has identified four main areas of focus: intelligence sharing, strategic analysis, operational support, and training. This motion proposes that the Alberta government increase its support of CISA so it can continue to be an aggressive force in the fight against organized crime.

Mr. Speaker, based on what we know right now, there's a lot of work to be done in the fight against criminal networks. The main organized crime groups that CISA focuses its resources on are outlaw motorcycle gangs, Asian-based gangs, aboriginal gangs, and eastern European based gangs.

Outlaw motorcycle gangs are involved in money laundering, prostitution, assaults, murder, fraud, thefts, counterfeiting, and extortion. They continue to be involved in the importing and trafficking of cocaine as well as the growing and selling of high-grade marijuana. There are three chapters of motorcycle gangs in the province, stationed in Edmonton, Calgary, and Red Deer. While these groups primarily operate within these three municipalities, their criminal activities extend throughout Alberta, from Medicine Hat in the southeast and Lethbridge in the south to Grande Prairie in the northwest and Fort McMurray in the north.

8:50

Asian-based organized crime groups are based in the urban centres of Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, Toronto, Montreal, but smaller cities in rural areas are increasingly being used to conduct their criminal activities. Asian gangs continue to be extensively involved in drug trafficking, extortion, prostitution, home invasions, illegal migrant smuggling, kidnapping, illegal gambling, and money laundering. Asian organized crime groups associate with youth and street gangs from mixed ethnic backgrounds and use these groups as sources of labour and recruits and as an insulation to shield their senior members from the attention of rival gangs and law enforcement agencies.

Enforcement agencies have identified nine aboriginal-based gangs or criminal organizations. While some of the recruitment of gangs has occurred in various areas of Alberta, considerable recruitment of gang members has occurred within provincial and federal corrections facilities. Once these individuals are released back into society, they continue to recruit in their local communities. The primary illegal activities of aboriginal gangs have been drug trafficking, prostitution, and the sale of black-market cigarettes.

The fourth group, Mr. Speaker, is eastern European gangs. Since the breakup of the former Soviet Union eastern European organized crime groups have increasingly moved into North American cities. Calgary and Edmonton are no exception, and they are home to some of these groups, who use very sophisticated technologies. Eastern European organized crime groups specialize in diamond smuggling, drug trafficking, fraud, extortion, prostitution, and money laundering. It's clear to see that organized crime is not just a big-city problem. It's a problem that faces small- and medium-sized communities as well, and without continued support for institutions like CISA, the grasp of organized crime will only increase and tighten.

Between April of 1999 and March of 2002 the CISA executive committee approved a total of 15 joint forces operations targeting a variety of organized crime groups. Nine of the 15 have been completed. These multiagency investigations have all utilized a

diverse approach with the ultimate goal of dismantling the groups that were targeted. Two of the most successful operations are Project Kachou and Operation Pitbull. Operation Pitbull in late '99 resulted in 19 suspected gang members charged with 58 criminal offences. As a result, an aboriginal gang in the southern part of the province no longer appears to be structured or criminally active.

Project Kachou was a yearlong investigation conducted by the RCMP and the Edmonton police into alleged illegal activities of an Asian-based organized crime group operating right here out of Edmonton. In excess of 60 accused were subsequently arrested and charged for a variety of drug trafficking and criminal offences. Approximately \$1.7 million in alleged illegal proceeds of crime have been restrained, of which \$225,000 has been forfeited to the Crown. Significant quantities of illegal drugs have also been seized. To date 18 accused have pled guilty to a variety of offences, receiving sentences ranging from fines to five years in jail. Three of these accused have since been deported from Canada. Two different groups of accused, eight in one group and 18 in the second group, are proceeding through the court process right now.

Overall, the nine completed operations have produced impressive enforcement results which include criminal charges against 203 key figures operating within criminal organizations. Of those charged, 37 have already been convicted, receiving sentences ranging from fines to seven years in prison. Approximately \$4 million in street value of illegal drugs have been seized during the course of these operations. Numerous handguns, rifles, and automatic weapons have also been seized and forfeited. Also, approximately \$3,600,000 in alleged illegal proceeds of crime have been restrained, with over \$500,000 already being forfeited to the Crown.

Organized crime is a problem that continues to plague societies around the world. There's no solution to defeating organized crime other than well-trained, well-funded, and well-informed enforcement agencies. Criminal Intelligence Service Alberta is vital in the fight against organized crime, and I strongly urge the government to continue to work with and support CISA and increase funding to this impressive institution so Alberta's communities can remain safe and secure.

Thank you.

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

Ms Carlson: Thank you. I have read this motion intently and listened to the two speakers and can't understand why we have a motion. It isn't actually the proper use of this legislative time. What I heard members say was that they want to see more or at least continuing support for Criminal Intelligence Service Alberta, and everybody in this Assembly would agree with that, Mr. Speaker, but motions are more properly used to urge the government to take some kind of action. I don't see any action here being urged by this particular motion.

If the member wants to congratulate all the integrated intelligence units working together co-operatively in Alberta, then a couple of things could be done. The minister could do a ministerial statement. Each and every time they have a successful crime completion rate or something outstanding happens, the members that have spoken so far could get up and give private members' statements outlining their support for this organization. Recognitions could be done at appropriate times. Those would be the proper uses of this Legislative Assembly, not a motion urging them to keep up the good work and: yes, pat, pat, pat on the back, you've done an excellent job, and we're going to continue to support you. That is not a proper use of this time.

It is true that the integrated intelligence units work hard and do a

very good job. I know this for a fact because my ex-husband worked in this particular unit for a long time with the RCMP, and I know that the integrated intelligence unit with the RCMP and the Edmonton police force has been at work for more than 30 years. My ex-husband worked there as an undercover operator, covering an undercover operator, doing strategic development, focusing particularly on biker gangs, on stolen property rings, on Asian organized crime units. Yes, all of these things are happening in this province. Yes, they are flourishing in this province. Yes, all of these police services could use way more resources to combat this. But there is existing wonderful co-operation. They send in undercover operators from different jurisdictions all the time. They have joint meetings and studies and training sessions and shared information all the time. Unless this member is seriously urging the government to give them more resources, then this motion is a waste of time from this perspective.

Also, knowing what I know about these organizations and how they work, they don't want specifics of their cases broadcast everywhere. Do they want people to know that we have a very effective organized crime unit here in this province? Yes. And we do, and you've said that, and say it again as many times as you want to in a recognition or a private member's statement, but save motions to do what they were meant to do, and that is to urge the government to action in some course and not waste the Assembly's time in this particular fashion.

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

Rev. Abbott: Good evening, Mr. Speaker, and thank you. I'm very pleased to be here tonight to speak in favour of Motion 508. I'd like to begin my remarks by commending my friend the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo for introducing this motion. We live in a time of increasing uncertainty, where organized crime and terrorism pose real threats to safety, security, and our collective well-being as a society.

The Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, but the time limit for consideration of this matter of business is now concluded.

9:00head: Private Bills

head: Second Reading

Bill Pr. 1

Sisters of St. Joseph of the Province of Alberta Statutes Repeal Act

Mr. Griffiths: Mr. Speaker, I move second reading of Bill Pr. 1, Sisters of St. Joseph of the Province of Alberta Statutes Repeal Act.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wainwright to close debate, or should we call the question?

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 1 read a second time]

Bill Pr. 2

Forest Lawn Bible College Act

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

Mr. Pham: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I now move second reading of Bill Pr. 2, Forest Lawn Bible College Act.

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

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to express some concerns about this particular bill. I've been looking through the bill and reading the minutes of the Private Bills Committee, and as I say, I have some uneasiness about what we would be doing under this bill.

There are, it seems to me, a number of open aspects to this legislation which make me concerned that we really have no grip on where this particular organization, the Forest Lawn Bible College, may go and what it may metamorphose into. I start with the very first line of the bill, which is the preamble and reads:

Whereas Forest Lawn Bible College proposes to carry on its endeavours together with other organizations who may from time to time agree to associate and co-operate with them under the name Forest Lawn Bible College . . .

That certainly gives me the impression that we're creating an umbrella organization here that may bring all kinds of other organizations under that umbrella. We just have no idea what they'll be as far as I understand this legislation.

I'm also concerned about a trend in which we create more and more institutions which grant degrees. Admittedly in this case there's only one kind of degree that will be granted, and that's a degree in divinity, but the organization that we would be creating under this act would have the capacity to provide certificates and diploma programs in education, arts, science, and other fields as the board may from time to time determine. That's enormous. That's without limit. I am very uneasy about creating an organization like this over which we would have very, very little public control, which would have the capacity to provide diplomas in education or diplomas in science. It says here:

the College has all the powers, privileges and immunities vested by law in a corporation . . . and more particularly, but without limiting the generality of the foregoing, the College may

provide these diplomas. So in my interpretation it is up to the college to determine the standards that would be required for these diplomas. I think we need to be very careful as a society to protect the integrity of the notion of a diploma and even more so of a degree and that we have taken some steps and continue to take steps in Alberta to ensure that happens. So I am also concerned about that sort of principle of this bill.

I also note that the bill, if it is passed, will allow Forest Lawn Bible College to "draw, make, accept, endorse, execute or issue promissory notes, bills of exchange and other negotiable instruments." Again, an enormous privilege that we would be granting this organization, a privilege potentially to issue any kind of negotiable instrument, which means a negotiable financial instrument. I am uneasy about that sort of legislation as well for an organization of this type. This feels like a sweeping and general and extraordinarily generous response to a very specific lobbying effort by a handful of people, some of whom are actually I believe named in the act.

I just feel that as a Legislature and as legislators we have a responsibility to be exceedingly careful in who we grant these kinds of powers to and what organizations we grant these kinds of powers to to protect the integrity of the entire education system and indeed also to protect the integrity and protect the welfare of the people who may be attending this sort of a college. There is no particular provision in here to ensure that people who might apply to this college – and they might come from anywhere in the world. It certainly has an international flavour to it. There's no provision in here to protect their interests, no sort of consumer orientation here, and I do think that at times we have a responsibility.

Canadian educational institutions have a fine reputation around the world, and we need to ensure that there aren't any opportunities for people, either through mismanagement or through other problematic initiatives, other activities, to take advantage of people who put

their trust in a Canadian organization because it's Canadian and then land here and realize: gosh; my diploma in science or my diploma in arts or my diploma in whatever field it may be really isn't going to be worth very much.

So I am uneasy to the point of personally having to oppose this bill, Mr. Speaker, for those reasons. Thank you.

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

Ms Kryczka: Yes. I'm very pleased to stand and make a few comments in response to the hon. member from the other side and certainly in support of the private bill submitted by the Forest Lawn Bible College. As a member of the committee I was there and participated in the discussions, and certainly in the last meeting of the committee there was a fairly full discussion that did occur on this topic, and the recommendation of the committee was to approve the passing of this bill for second reading.

I think that the hon. member makes much ado about nothing, basically, in his comments, and I have to say that I would ascribe that to some of the comments that were made during the discussion. Of course, that's only my opinion, but I felt that the members that are setting up this Bible college – it's a very multicultural group of people – appear to be very honourable and well-intentioned. As far as I could see and understand from what they presented, their intent of establishing the Bible college is to educate and train students in spiritual matters in order that they may build a church and provide preachers or pastors – I understand that the word would be "pastor" – in the local setting, especially for older members of the multicultural community who cannot speak or understand English.

I think that to me that is a very basic need for immigrants. We welcome them to our society, and most of them have fled their motherland, where religion is suppressed, the religion that they have traditionally practised. I understand also that possibly some of these people who have been trained or educated here may return to the motherland and again try, where possible, to provide the religious teachings to people, as I say, whose religion for many years has been suppressed. As far as I'm concerned, in the area of divinity this was a really good learning experience for me. I was raised in the United Church, and in fact at one point in time I considered going into theology myself, but other aspirations beckoned.

I did not realize that with Alberta Learning you can grant degrees in divinity, and Alberta Learning does not have to approve that. Certainly also with certificates and diplomas the same applies, and we had a representative from Alberta Learning at our first meeting who certainly stressed that point. So I guess what I'm saying is: divinity is in a different category.

9:10

There was some discussion around members of the Bible college who would teach, and again they were from many varied multicultural backgrounds and countries but people who have degrees, certainly postsecondary education and degrees from their country. So personally I didn't really take issue with any of their presentation. I think that the committee also decided that seeing as this same Private Bills Committee had approved a similar application in 1996, there had been a precedent set.

So basically those are all my comments that I would like to make in support of approval of this bill. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. member, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is now available. Is this what you're pursuing, hon. member?

Ms Blakeman: No, thank you.

The Speaker: No questions?

Then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm prompted to rise and put my concerns or hesitations on the record. Having listened to the speakers speaking in favour of this, I'm wondering if we're not confusing the issue of the practice of one's choice of religion with setting up a teaching postsecondary institution in Alberta. What's being contemplated by this private member's bill is outside of the accreditation process, which is what is making it necessary to approach it through the private members' private bills format that is available through this Assembly. If in fact this was an accredited institution and met the criteria set out by Alberta Learning, this bill would not be before us, but they are not able to meet that accreditation, and therefore they are going a different route and approaching through the private members' private bills to have this learning institution, teaching institution, set up.

Now, the only degree that they are able to grant is a divinity degree. I'm looking at the *Hansard* from the meeting of the Private Bills Committee on Tuesday, April 8, and it is explained in these minutes by the staff person.

By and large, these programs over the years have been programs that have been designed by specific religious groups to train people to teach in that particular faith, so the department has not interfered with the content, the feeling being that members of that faith are the individuals who would be best prepared to design a program of that nature.

That's the rationale for why the department doesn't require program approval for these divinity programs from these colleges.

I agree with my colleague from Edmonton-Riverview. I, too, have concerns, and I'm even more concerned when I hear that part of the rationale for supporting this is that we supported a similar bill in 1996, and I think that simply can become just self-perpetuating. There may well have been a problem with the institution that was accredited in 1996. I don't know if the Member for Calgary-West went back and investigated that. Perhaps she did, but she didn't mention that in her remarks, and therefore we're now potentially perpetuating that problem by referring back and going: well, we did it before, so now we'll have to do it again. I don't think that's a good reason for coming before this Assembly and creating an academic institution through an act of legislation. I think there are too many problems that were brought up, too many questions that were not answered where members of the committee went back and repeatedly asked the questions again and were not satisfied with the answers themselves.

You know, I have a lot of respect for the committee deciding in the end to bring forward the bill to this Assembly, but that doesn't mean that this Assembly then rubber-stamps it. If that were the case, I would not have the freedom to get up and debate it. So there is another process that these bills pass through in allowing them to be debated in this House, and I'm taking this opportunity, then, with that parliamentary process that is in fact granted to me to express my concerns about this Legislature through an act of legislation setting up a Bible college which would be granting this divinity degree plus unspecified other diploma and certificate programs. Those questions were not satisfactorily answered during the debate with them. I don't think that we need an act of legislation to practise religion freely. We don't. What's being anticipated in this is the ability to teach that.

Now, because it's not accredited, there should not be any taxpayer money involved with this institution nor should students be able to apply for a government-sponsored loan program to help subsidize any tuition that would be involved here. So any liability or risk for

the Alberta taxpayer would not be involved in this particular endeavour. Nonetheless, I think it raises some troubling questions, and I'm not at this point willing to support the creation of what's being contemplated here.

Thank you.

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

The hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose to close the debate.

Mr. Pham: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have listened very carefully to the three speakers. The Member for Edmonton-Riverview and the Member for Edmonton-Centre have raised some concerns about the bill. I also would like to thank the Member for Calgary-West for her comments, and I believe that some of her comments have addressed some of the questions raised by the Member for Edmonton-Riverview. However, there are still some questions I would like to address at this time. The first one is that there is a concern raised about foreign students and the fear that this Bible college somehow will attract foreign students and will give them a bad deal for their money. I would like to let those members know that for a foreign student to obtain a student visa to come to Canada to study, they have to register in an accredited program in an accredited institution. Because this is not an accredited institution, students, for instance, who want to go to this Bible college will not be able to obtain a student visa. That's number one.

Secondly, as a long tradition of the House we have the Private Bills Committee where members with concerns can bring their concerns. I remind the members that is an all-party committee. This committee has reviewed this bill extensively, and I urge the members opposite to go back and review the *Hansard* of those meetings.

Another question that was raised by the member opposite. I sponsored a similar bill in 1996, the Evangel Bible College Act, and there was some reference made to it as to there may be some problems with that college. That college is right inside my riding. It's still functioning very well today, and there have been no problems at all. The content of this bill is almost exactly like the other bill, word for word. So all I can say is that up to now the college that had the bill passed in 1996 has functioned very well.

9:20

There will be an amendment proposed at the Committee of the Whole stage that may address some of the concerns brought forward by the members opposite. Basically, that amendment will narrow the scope of the field that the Bible college may be able to grant degrees in.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I close debate on Bill Pr. 2 and ask for the question to be called.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 2 read a second time]

head: **Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders**

head: Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

The Chair: Committee of the Whole is called to order.

**Bill Pr. 1
Sisters of St. Joseph of the Province of Alberta
Statutes Repeal Act**

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Wainwright.

Mr. Griffiths: I move that the question be put.

The Chair: That's okay. If there are no people wishing, then to the question.

[Title and preamble agreed to]

[The clauses of Bill Pr. 1 agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill Pr. 2
Forest Lawn Bible College Act

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose.

Mr. Pham: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I move that Bill Pr. 2 be amended as follows: section 3(a) is amended by striking out "in such fields as the Board may from time to time determine" and substituting "in the fields outlined in section 5(1)(a)" and would ask the pages to now circulate the amendment.

The Chair: We'll call this amendment A1. Hon. member, if you'd just pause for a moment, we will hopefully get these distributed throughout the Chamber.

Okay. Hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose, having moved, would you like to explain further anything on amendment A1?

Mr. Pham: This is a very simple amendment, Mr. Chairman. All it does is try to narrow down the field that the college may be able to grant degrees in, and this amendment is recommended by staff from Alberta Learning.

The Chair: Any comments with regard to amendment A1?

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Chair: Further comments or questions with respect to the contents of the bill?

[Title and preamble agreed to]

[The clauses of Bill Pr. 2 as amended agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would now move that the committee rise and report bills Pr. 1 and Pr. 2.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following: Bill Pr. 1. The committee reports the following with some amendments: Bill Pr. 2. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: All those who concur in this report, please say aye.

Some Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Those opposed, please say no.

Some Hon. Members: No.

The Deputy Speaker: The motion is carried.

head: **Government Bills and Orders**

head: Second Reading

Bill 33
Insurance Amendment Act, 2003

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

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise this evening and move second reading of Bill 33, the Insurance Amendment Act, 2003.

The proposed bill contains two amendments to the Insurance Act that will ensure that awards resulting from an automobile accident return an individual to the same financial position they existed in before the accident occurred. These amendments are, one, to eliminate the potential for double-dipping, or recovering compensation for the same expenses from more than one insurer and, two, to ensure that income replacement awards are based on an individual's net versus gross pay.

Mr. Speaker, these amendments are the result of the government hearing the concerns that have been expressed by the public regarding the current state of our automobile insurance system. We've all had letters and calls from shocked constituents when they open their latest insurance bills. In the past year premiums have increased significantly. Many Albertans have had difficulties finding insurance that fits within their budgets, and because automobile insurance is mandatory, they have voiced their dissatisfaction to the government. In many cases premium rates have increased on average by almost 15 percent since 2001. During 2002 figures from the Alberta Automobile Insurance Board show that five insurance companies obtained approval for premium increases that range from 15 percent to just over 31 percent. That's five out of approximately 70 companies, Mr. Speaker. Indications are that these increases will continue in the coming year.

9:30

In responding to this public issue, Alberta Finance identified a review of our automobile insurance system in its 2003-2006 business plan. The amendments in Bill 33 constitute the completion of the first step of this review. The amendments are not a panacea intended to address all the issues that exist in Alberta with automobile insurance. However, they are an attempt to respond with some immediacy with solutions to two pressing issues, which could assist in helping to stabilize premiums. Later this year Alberta Finance will conduct a more comprehensive review of the automobile

insurance system to identify long-term solutions. Our plan is completion of the review this calendar year and government consideration next spring.

Mr. Speaker, a point that needs to be made is that the issues that Alberta motorists are facing with rising automobile insurance premiums are not unique to our province. Provinces across this country are experiencing the same public pressures that result from rising premiums. We are talking to these provinces and sharing information. We have learned from their experiences as well. The two amendments that are contained in this bill have already been adopted and implemented in New Brunswick and Ontario. Recently New Brunswick announced further amendments to its Insurance Act that go far beyond what is being proposed by Bill 33. For example, New Brunswick is proposing to define soft-tissue injury, to cap pain and suffering awards for soft-tissue injuries and minor personal injuries, to require insurers to obtain government approval for rate increases in excess of 3 percent, and, finally, to prohibit insurers from refusing to insure due to age, age of the vehicle, past no-fault accident history, lapse in coverage, or past cancellation or nonrenewal of a policy. Now Alberta insurers are already required to file rate increases for approval with the Automobile Insurance Board. This has been the practice since 1972, when insurance became compulsory in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to take some time to talk in a little more detail about the proposed amendments in this bill. First, I would like to talk about the amendment that bases financial compensation on an individual's net versus gross income. As it presently stands today, the loss-of-income claim is based on a person's gross pay, and the end result is that that individual takes home more money than they did prior to the accident. For example, an individual earning \$5,800 a month takes home about \$4,113 after deductions of almost \$1,600 for income tax, CPP, and EI premiums. Under the current system if an individual were injured in an automobile accident, the court would award gross pay, which in this case would be \$5,800. No deductions would be taken off.

Mr. Speaker, the principle that is being applied to the amendments in this bill is that an individual that is injured in an automobile accident should be returned to the same financial position as before the collision occurred, nothing more and nothing less. Bill 33 proposes that income replacement awards be reduced by the same amounts that would have been taken off an individual's gross pay before they were injured, making them eligible now for the \$4,113 instead of \$5,800, as is the case in our current awards practice.

As I mentioned earlier, the second amendment deals with eliminating the potential for double-dipping for the same expenses from more than one insurer. Currently a person injured in an auto accident may receive double payment for medical rehabilitation and income replacement benefits. A person may receive these benefits from their employee benefit plan or private insurance, and they can collect the same amount of these benefits from the auto insurer of the person who caused the accident. In these instances claimants find themselves in a more favourable financial position in comparison to the position they were in before the accident occurred. For example again, an individual injured in an automobile accident may have a claim for, let's say, \$5,000 in lost wages. If this person has private disability insurance, they can apply to that disability plan for income replacement. Typically, this is equivalent to 66 percent of their lost wages. The claimant, for the purposes of this example, would receive, then, \$3,000 from their private insurer. Now, when they settle their injury claim, they would also then receive an additional \$5,000 in compensation for lost wages from the automobile insurer. In total, the individual would recover \$8,000; in other words, a full \$3,000 more than the amount of their real wage loss. Bill 33

addresses this situation of overcompensation by requiring the automobile insurer to only pay the injured party \$2,000 or, in other words, the amount that remains uncompensated from the \$5,000 in their real lost wages.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to state that nothing in these amendments affects the right of subrogation. Currently insurance companies have subrogation rights for the payments made to their clients. If a wrongdoer caused the accident, the insurer providing the benefit has the right to collect from the wrongdoer. Those rights remain under this bill. The amendments relating to collateral benefits also ensure that where a collateral benefit is payable net of tax, the award will not be taxed a second time. Again, the principle that is being applied here is simple and straightforward, and at the risk of repeating myself, that principle is that an individual that is injured in an automobile accident should be returned to the same financial position as before the collision occurred; nothing more, nothing less.

During the consultation process done by Alberta Finance with industry stakeholders last December, concerns were raised that these proposed amendments will result in unfair treatment or will disadvantage individuals whose income fluctuates on a year-to-year basis, such as for self-employed individuals, farmers, or business owners. Mr. Speaker, this is simply not the case. The bill does not affect how loss-of-income claims are settled. Income compensation will be evaluated in the same manner after this bill as it is currently evaluated today. Whether an individual is self-employed, a farmer, or an employee of an organization, the determination of the appropriate compensation will not change. However, once the compensation has been determined, it will be adjusted so that it is paid on a net income basis rather than a gross income basis. The only difference that this bill will make to this process will be that income replacement awards will now be awarded on net versus gross pay. Also, if that individual has received income replacement or payments for medical and rehabilitation expenses prior to the resolution of their claim against an automobile insurer, these payments will be deducted from their settlement.

While I acknowledge that the two amendments proposed in this bill do not solve all the issues in the automobile insurance system, they are an important first step. If adopted, they will bring Alberta in line with other jurisdictions that are facing similar problems and have moved forward with similar amendments. These amendments also allow the government the opportunity to move to engage insurance industry stakeholders in a more comprehensive discussion on long-term solutions that will help bring long-term stability to insurance premiums for all Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Ms Blakeman: Yeah, those poor insurance companies standing on those cold street corners, clutching about them their tattered rags, their little noses running from the cold, and their cheeks gaunt from the lack of nutrition that they'd had. My goodness, I feel so bad about those insurance companies.

Mr. McClelland: Those poor injury lawyers.

Ms Blakeman: Those poor injury lawyers. Yeah, this is going to be a fun debate; I can tell.

I am struggling to work up a great amount of sympathy for those undernourished Prudentials and Sun Lifes and Great-Wests and Manulifes, as I say, shivering in the cold on the corner from the lack of profits because their stock market holdings have not been great. So now they don't want to pay out insurance premiums to people. My question is: who benefits from this bill? Not Albertans, that's

for sure. Who benefits? These huge insurance companies. I'm supposed to feel sorry for Prudential and Great-West and Sun Life and Manulife and Peace Hills and whoever heck else? These are monumentally large companies that make stupendous profits and don't want to pay them out.

That's what insurance is. You're betting against an insurance company on who will be right and that if you're wrong, somehow you will get compensation, and they're betting that they'll be right. That's what the actuarial tables are about. Who usually wins here? The insurance companies. That's why they're so big. That's why they're so rich. So try as I might, I can't ring out even one tiny little tear of sadness for these poor, downtrodden, starving, tattered, multinational insurance companies. Give me a break.

9:40

Who benefits here? This is the third suggested motion or parliamentary process I've seen brought forward here tonight in which Albertans are not the primary beneficiary of what's being proposed. I think we should all look at what kind of work we're doing in this Assembly on behalf of regular Albertans, because this is about making the insurance companies happy. I'm wondering: were the insurance companies one of the Wednesday night sponsors within the last couple of months? That sure is what it looks like to me.

Now, I will say that I don't have that much trouble with the section that says: income tax will be reduced; Canada pension plan will be reduced. And if in fact employment insurance would honour a premium that was paid under such a scheme and would allow someone to collect further down the line when this was money that was not actually income from work but revenue from another source – and I think there's an argument to be made there that EI would not allow the person to later collect EI benefits, even though the payment was made. Nonetheless, I can accept the argument that that's reasonable, that if someone is given an award, those deductions should be taken off.

Where I cannot and will not accept what is being proposed by members of government is the idea that if someone has paid one, two, three, or four insurance premiums – I don't care how many they had, frankly – if they have paid the insurance premiums on all of them, they should be able to collect on all of them. They've paid it. They should be able to collect. The government is now in the business, this government who doesn't want to be in the business of interfering with people's lives – well, the only lives they seem to be willing to interfere with is plain old Albertans', those that want to have more than one premium for whatever reason, and the government now wants to say: no, you can't have that.

Well, there are darn good reasons why people have more than one set of premiums, and I'll give you a couple of examples. Those people that work in the arts, for example, need to carry their own disability and life insurance. It's hard to get as an artist, and if you can manage to get it when you're young, which is the time to get it, and you're locked into your standard payments every five years – you pay the same amount for five years; then they're going to up it a little bit – you don't want to drop that premium. If for some reason you did get employed by someone else who said, "All our employees are covered by so-and-so insurance plan and you all must pay this and we'll pay half the premium, but you must take it, no choice," well, that artist would not be a wise person if they dropped the initial insurance that they'd been carrying, because after they leave this job that's insisting they take a second insurance, they won't be able to get the premium back at the first rate that they were paying. So they're better off to keep paying that. Now, there's a situation where you've got someone with not a lot of resources that's now having to

pay those two insurances to make sure that the one is there for them at the end and the employer saying, "You must pay this insurance premium," whether they like it or not.

This government would now say: "You don't get to collect on those. Even though you're in a position where you must pay for both of them, we're going to determine that you can't collect on both of them." Well, why not? What kind of consumer protection is this?

Dr. Taft: It's corporate protection.

Ms Blakeman: Well, yeah. It's not consumer protection; it's corporate protection.

I remember there was a very well chosen phrase called corporate welfare. We now have a different version of corporate welfare here, and it's coming through the insurance industry. We won't protect the individuals who wish to have a benefit plan to protect themselves. No, no, no. We're going to protect – can you believe this? – multinational insurance companies. Oh, those poor starving insurance companies. They invested in the stock market and have lost some money in it, so now they're going to hike up their insurance premiums. Quick, everybody rush around and try to help the insurance companies. This is outrageous. It does not benefit average Albertans. It doesn't. It only benefits those insurance companies. So who is the government really concerned about here?

We have not only self-employed people like actors, for example. Farmers would be another one. I suppose there could be fisher people in Alberta, seasonal workers, part-time workers, contractors, self-employed. All of those people may well be in the same position that I just described to you. Consultants is another one. This government has been very keen on letting go a lot of their employees over the years and then hiring them back as a consultant, for which they're paid a flat rate. Well, that consultant would be in the position where they'd have to be carrying their own insurance now and may well be told: sorry, you're not going to be able to collect on it because we the government are more concerned about an insurance company than we are about you, an Albertan.

Now, I listened, and I hope that the member is going to clarify this. I thought that he said in the beginning that insurance rates were rising and that five out of 70 companies had raised their rates, so, oh, my gosh, we'd better bring this bill in. I cannot believe that. I'm going to ask that member to come back and answer me now or through another one of his colleagues as to whether he's basing this whole bill on five out of 70 insurance companies raising their rates by whatever he said, between 15 and 30 percent.

Mr. Zwodzesky: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to rise on a point of order, if I may.

Point of Order Relevance

Mr. Zwodzesky: *Beauchesne* 459 on relevance. My recollection of the bill before us is that it deals with car and motor vehicle insurance, and while I'm sure that there are some compelling arguments that the hon. member speaking has about life insurance and other related insurance mechanisms, perhaps we could zero in on specifically what this bill is about.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member on the point of order.

Ms Blakeman: Yeah. It's exactly about that because in subsection (4) it talks about out of province no-fault insurers and other insurers, CPP disability pensions, WCB, et cetera. So all of those issues that I was talking about are encapsulated in those phrases, which I took

in fact directly out of the legislation. So if anything I'm even more on point than I thought I was.

Mr. McClelland: Even more?

Ms Blakeman: Even more on point than I thought I was.
Would the Speaker like to rule on the point of order?

The Deputy Speaker: Well, it occurs to the Speaker in trying to read it – and the chair cannot be intimately knowledgeable on each and every bill that comes before it – that the bill deals with accident claims and awards under them, and presumably in life insurance the only accident is death itself, so one would wonder about that.

In terms of relevance, that would be something for in part the hon. proposer of the bill to determine, whether or not all of the comments are relevant given that you think they are not. It would seem to me that it is about car insurance, motor vehicle insurance, and not about life insurance.

Debate Continued

Ms Blakeman: Mr. Speaker, sorry. If I've said life insurance, then I agree that I should be chastised for misleading people. I was really talking about disability insurance, which certainly would come into play if we were talking about car accidents and someone being injured, being off work, the kind of insurance that people carry, which is income replacement, that kind of insurance. So I'm sorry.

In the particular policy that I have, the life insurance and the disability are part of the same policy, so that's how I approach it. I've just done the same thing that I've accused the members opposite of doing, which is putting their own circumstances onto everyone else. So I'll certainly agree to be guilty on that point. Nonetheless, I will not take back one word that I have said. Well, the life insurance stuff I'll take back. But this thing about these poor insurance companies – I mean, please, Mr. Speaker.

9:50

My underlying concern about what's being proposed here is: who does this bill benefit? Not citizens, not the people that we're elected to be here to look after. I'm not elected to look after the interests of the insurance companies. I'm elected to look after the interests of the people that live in Edmonton-Centre, and those are my concerns. If they have this kind of – now, be careful here, Laurie – work replacement insurance and disability insurance and are in a car accident or something where this particular bill would come into play, I want to make sure that my constituents and the people of Alberta are going to come out ahead here. If it's going to be a race between insurance companies and the people of Alberta, it's the people of Alberta that I'm more concerned about. So there's a question about who benefits, and I think it's not Albertans.

There's a question about consumer protection. If you pay for more than one policy, then you should be able to collect on more than one policy. If the government is going to start determining what policies people can buy and what they can't buy, then we're into a whole other ball game here, and this is a whole other discussion with a much larger bill that needs to be brought in in which the government is going to start telling people exactly what kind of insurance they may or may not buy, which seems to be what's happening.

Mr. Mason: Like in Albania.

Ms Blakeman: I'll let you go there.

I reiterate that I think it's important that people who draw a salary

that goes into their bank account by direct deposit every two weeks should be very careful when they start passing legislation that is going to affect Albertans who work under very different circumstances – those who are self-employed, who are contractors, who are part-time workers, who are seasonal workers – who for a number of reasons may have to have other policies that they keep up in order to have at least one policy that they can fall back on and may be required at other times to be paying for all or part of another policy given an employer's wishes. So there's good reason why people may have more than one policy at a time that they would be drawing on in the event of a car accident or something else that's anticipated by this legislation.

I've gone at this debate with as much levity as I can muster given my absolute sense of outrage at what this government is attempting to perpetrate upon the citizens of Alberta. I think it is unforgivable what is being contemplated here and demonstrates an attitude of this government against regular Albertans that is unconscionable.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and speak to Bill 33, the Insurance Amendment Act, 2003. You know, I think that the bill is very timely – it speaks volumes about the government's priorities – because there is a serious problem with auto insurance in this province. There is a serious problem. We have a situation now where many young people, in fact many people who aren't so young, have an awful time affording car insurance. We have a situation where rates have been skyrocketing in this province for some time, and the number of complaints that I'm getting, I'm sure that even members opposite are getting, are multiplying.

We have a real problem with auto insurance in this province right now, Mr. Speaker. We have people having their policies arbitrarily canceled after one or two claims. We have all sorts of difficulties: people with reasonably good driving records finding it very difficult to get automobile insurance. We have gross discrimination on the basis of age and of sex in the provision of coverage for insurance.

Mrs. O'Neill: Gender.

Mr. Mason: Gender. Thank you, hon. member.

All in all, we have a real difficulty because the insurance industry is no longer meeting the needs of the people of this province when it comes to car insurance, but on this problem, Mr. Speaker, the government is silent. It doesn't propose any bills to fix that problem because it believes in the marketplace even when the marketplace has demonstrably failed to meet the needs of Albertans.

On the other hand, the insurance industry itself has coasted for some time by taking the money that we pay to them in premiums and investing it in the stock market and earning substantial amounts of money from dividends. Well, we all know that in the last couple of years the free enterprise economy of the United States and Canada in particular and Asia and Latin America and most other places has gone to hell in a handbasket. People have lost a lot of money on their investments because they thought, as countless generations before them have thought, that the market will continue to grow and increase in value and it'll never come down. This has happened to the insurance industry of this country, and the excess profits that they have been able to generate by taking our money and investing it has dried up or shrunk or diminished, and now they're hurting a little bit. They claim that they're paying more out in claims than they receive in premiums. Of course, they completely ignore the fact

that for many, many years they made far more money on premiums than they paid out in claims. So they've got a market adjustment, a cycle they're going through, and instead of just sucking it up and admitting that this is just part of a business cycle that benefits them on average over the long run, they're asking the government to come and help them.

So you have on the one hand the people that depend on car insurance companies for insurance that are being gouged, that are being thrown off of their coverage, that can't get the coverage, and the government ignores those people. Then you get these poor insurance companies that are having a bit of a market correction, and they come to the government, and the government introduces a piece of legislation to limit claims. So now not only do we get gouged on premiums, not only do people lose their coverage, but now when they actually have a claim, the government is intervening to limit the amount that they can receive. Whose side is the government on, Mr. Speaker? Certainly not on the side of the people of Alberta. Certainly not on the side of the young drivers. Certainly not on the side of the motoring public, which comprises most people 16 years of age and older in this province. No, they're not on their side. They're on the side of the insurance companies because they're not making as much money as they're used to making. Well, nothing shows the priorities of this government better than this bill. This bill speaks volumes about who this government represents, who the government speaks for, and who they act for when they make laws.

Mr. Speaker, I would urge the government to withdraw this bill, let the insurance companies go through this part of the cycle where they've lost some money on their investments, and bring forward another bill, a bill that sets out rights for people who have car insurance, a bill that guarantees insurance at a reasonable rate, that oversees the insurance industry, that regulates the insurance industry and makes sure that they provide value for money to the people of Alberta for their car insurance and that people are not denied coverage on an unreasonable basis just because the insurance company doesn't want to take the risk with them. Why doesn't the government do that? Withdraw this bill and bring in another one that actually protects people from the insurance companies rather than protecting the insurance companies from the stock market. This bill is repulsive. It should be withdrawn. This bill is absolutely a condemnation of what the government claims to be doing in this province, which is looking out for Martha and Henry, which is looking out for ordinary Albertans.

10:00

I see the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar with his hands over his ears, saying: we're not listening. Well, I hope that some people are listening in this House tonight, Mr. Speaker, because this bill is not representative, and nothing could be more symbolic than the sponsor of the bill calling out during debate: we're not listening. We know they're not listening; that's the problem. You know, I wish the government would listen to Albertans and not listen to big insurance companies who are crying wolf and crying crocodile tears.

So, Mr. Speaker, that is all I have to say on this matter tonight. I would encourage all members to vote down this piece of legislation, which should rightly be called the insurance industry crutch act. With that, I will take my seat.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are you asking a question under Standing Order 29?

Dr. Taft: I don't see anybody rising to ask a question, but I'm sure they would be welcome.

The Deputy Speaker: If there are no questions or comments, then we will move on to the next speaker. The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Yeah, I do have a question. It's a very important one. I'm wondering why the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands did not listen to my speech, because I made it very clear that I was talking to Albertans and that I was listening to Albertans and that we consulted with Albertans and that the whole prompting of this bill was because of letters and calls from Albertans. I'm wondering why he would accuse me of having my hands over my ears when that absolutely was not true, Mr. Speaker. That's my question.

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

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, the hon. member claims to have consulted with Albertans, and I'm sure that there was some sort of consultation, but we certainly haven't heard on our side from people demanding that the payments to people who are legitimate claimants be reduced. The insurance industry is trying to make the claim that if you can reduce the amount of payouts on claims, you will actually be able to reduce insurance rates. If someone believes that if insurance companies get more money, they're going to be more generous in terms of reductions for claims, then I certainly have a deal for them on a bridge.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Edmonton-Riverview then.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This bill obviously is drawing sharp debate, and I look forward to a good deal more of it. I think there are a number of serious problems with the bill as it stands now. Fundamentally it protects big business from people, and we should be protecting people from these big insurance companies. The cause of the problem of skyrocketing insurance rates seems generally accepted to be that insurance companies have lost massively in their investments in the stock market, and we see this from research from Statistics Canada, research from industry observers, even in anecdotal evidence. I was just speaking this weekend to somebody who wanted to make a minor claim on their policy, and the insurance agent urged them: don't do it. Because the insurance companies have lost so much money on the stock market, the agent explained, if you make any kind of claim at all, they're going to jack your premium through the roof. The poor fellow ignored that advice, made the small claim, and is now considered a high risk for insurance. The agents themselves are saying that this is a problem stemming from losses in the stock market.

Now, the sponsoring member, the Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, has used the term "double-dipping," which in this case I think is a seriously misleading term, a misrepresentation of what's going on. If people happen to purchase two insurance policies or have disability coverage independently and then have disability coverage under their auto insurance, that's no different than buying two television sets or two hamburgers at McDonald's or anything else. It's not double-dipping; it's simply buying two independent products. I think the choice of the term "double-dipping" is deliberate, and it's taken very much from the insurance industry, which is trying to create a particular image of consumers taking advantage of the companies, when in fact what we have is companies trying to take advantage of this government's complacency to put the squeeze on consumers.

It should be understood by this member that this is in some ways an issue of personal freedom and consumer choice. If people want

to buy more than one policy, why don't we let them? What's to prevent them from doing that? If they have disability coverage in one form and disability coverage under their auto policy, what's your problem with that? It's a free world. They're paying for the products. In fact, I would say to you that the insurance companies will be guaranteeing that those products are actuarially sound, and if they aren't guaranteeing that, they're failing their mandate as insurance companies. So insurance companies should be insuring that their second policy is solid.

In fact, I'd like to propose something here. If this bill goes forward, Mr. Speaker, in this form, I think that we should propose an amendment to prevent insurance companies from double-selling. We should make it illegal for insurance companies to sell to anybody who already has an insurance policy covering that purpose. After all, wouldn't that only be fair? Wouldn't that be saying to consumers, "Yes, we're really out looking after you; we're going to prevent insurance companies from selling you products that you'll never be able to use"? I completely believe that insurance companies will go on day after day, month after month, year after year selling all the policies they can without informing consumers that there may be opportunities or chances when those policies will be invalid. So let's prevent insurance companies from double-selling.

Let's also look at the reality of this problem. How big is this problem really? I understand from information from the Insurance Bureau of Canada that claims costs in Alberta over the last 15 years have risen from \$160 million to \$800 million. Now, that sounds like a lot over 15 years, but if we adjust for inflation, if we adjust for a larger population, number of cars on the road, number of policies and so on, is this really such a bad problem after all? Let's be honest about the figures here and over time look at the trend and adjust that trend for things like inflation, population growth, the quality of the roads. How much of this might be due to deteriorating maintenance of the roads because road maintenance has been privatized? How about we look into that issue?

10:10

I'd also like to raise an issue for fundamental moral debate with the government members on this. Time and time again the government, and particularly the sponsoring member from Drayton Valley-Calmor, has said that people should be no better off financially after an accident than they were before. Let's take apart that principle and look at it. I can tell you right now that there are all kinds of people in all corners of this province who would gladly trade all the benefits they've ever received from all the insurance policies they've ever owned if only they could walk again or if only they could speak again or if only their child's brain injury were reversed. There isn't a person in this province, in this country, I'm sure, who wouldn't plead to have those kinds of injuries taken back and gladly return all the payouts from all the insurance companies here. Maybe there's in fact a point of natural justice here that somebody whose life has been utterly and permanently devastated by a car accident actually deserves more than they had before to at least symbolically compensate for the tragic loss.

I think, for example, of family friends of ours. The wife was a schoolteacher, and she was traveling with a class. She was chaperoning a class of students on a ski trip to Lake Louise. The bus left the road. She was sitting in the front passenger seat. She went through the front windshield. She has for years and years now been a complete quadriplegic, and certainly the insurance company paid ultimately for a new house and has provided all kinds of benefits. But you know what? I can't imagine that there was a moment in her life — and she is still alive today after all these years — that she wouldn't have given up all the payouts from all the insurance

companies to be able to walk again, to be able to feel her fingers and her toes, to be able to feel her breath coming in and going out. She has lost all of that, and to me there's a moral and human principle here that we should be considering: those people deserve more than just what they had before financially. So I challenge the Member for Drayton Valley-Calmor and all the other members of this Assembly to consider the moral issues here and to engage us in some meaningful debate on this issue.

Finally, because this is going to come up again, I would ask the government to consider undertaking a systematic comparison of auto insurance in the four western provinces. How are they functioning, one compared to the other, in terms of premiums and in terms of efficiency and in terms of payouts? Let's see. In B.C. it's publicly operated, but there's a fault system, I believe, in B.C. Saskatchewan and Manitoba have significantly different public systems, and in Alberta we have an entirely private system. Why don't we strike a truly independent group to review which system is working better? It would be a great comparison. I don't know; maybe it's working as well as possible in Alberta, but I'm not convinced. Let's seek the facts.

So, Mr. Speaker, with that handful of points, the challenge to this government — this notion of double-dipping is phony and misleading, and if we're serious about that, then let's be serious about preventing companies from double-selling. Let's really look at the real cost of this problem. Let's question the moral principle that this government seems to stick to that no matter how devastating the consequence, a person should be no better off financially afterwards than they were before. Let's engage in this debate. Let's be open. Let's consider amending this act or perhaps even withdrawing it.

Mr. Speaker, with those comments, I would like to move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 34

Livestock Industry Diversification Amendment Act, 2003

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmor.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the pleasure of rising tonight to move second reading of Bill 34, the Livestock Industry Diversification Amendment Act.

This is an important bill that will help Alberta's diversified livestock industry become more stable by simplifying the rules for handling and slaughter of diversified livestock while maintaining the division between wild and domesticated cervids. Just to clarify for some of our urban members, a cervid is essentially deer or elk.

Alberta has an extensive diversified livestock industry, one that we can be proud of. This bill will help Alberta's diversified livestock industry to become more successful domestically and internationally. This bill has undergone extensive consultations with the industry to make it responsive to their needs while ensuring the separation between domesticated and wild cervid populations. I want all members of this Assembly to understand the extent to which we have consulted with industry on this bill. Countless hours have been spent going over the ins and outs of this piece of legislation so that it meets the needs of our diversified livestock industry.

Mr. Speaker, this bill is only one small step to making this industry more viable by eliminating some of the restrictions and clarifying some of the rules around diversified livestock, or cervids. It will also reduce the risk of crossbreeding between wild and domesticated cervids, reducing the risks of disease migration in both directions.

There are many parts to this bill, and I'll go over some of the highlights for you tonight. One of the more important changes is to amend the definition of cervid and cervid farms. The Livestock Industry Diversification Act, or LIDA as we will call it, will amend the definition to domestic cervid animals and the facilities they are held on as domestic cervid farms. There will be consequential amendments to the Wildlife Act to ensure that current government policy is maintained.

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

The Deputy Speaker: Sorry to interrupt, but we seem to have a lively either conversation or debate which is not to the benefit of the other members because it becomes difficult to hear the hon. member who has been recognized. So would the hon. minister and the hon. member over here cease and desist or, better yet, go and carry on your debate in the outside rooms. That's perfectly fine, but not in here, hon. members.

The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Debate Continued

Rev. Abbott: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. There will also be changes to how and where a domesticated cervid can be held.

The Deputy Speaker: Once again I'll just ask the hon. Minister of Environment and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands to go outside and carry on your debate now, not behind your back.

The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. These changes will make it easier for producers to move their animals while ensuring that there is no contact between domesticated and wild cervid populations. To further ensure that there is little to no contact between domesticated and wild cervid populations, the act will be clear that no person shall release a domestic cervid into the wild. Where an animal escapes from a licensed facility, the operator or operators must report the incident and have an opportunity to recapture their animals within a reasonable time frame. If the animal is not recaptured, the elk or deer becomes wildlife as defined by the Wildlife Act.

The amendment to the LIDA with the consequential amendment to the Wildlife Act will maintain current government policy, so it will not be necessary to undertake a major stakeholder review of the Wildlife Act. Animals from other jurisdictions in Canada or elsewhere do not become domestic cervid animals until they are registered and identified on a domestic cervid farm. These animals are subject to the importation legislation provided by the Wildlife Act.

10:20

Mr. Speaker, there are significant changes to where domesticated cervid can be slaughtered and who can do the slaughtering. Previously they could only be slaughtered at licensed abattoirs in accordance with the Meat Inspection Act. This was to ensure that all animals were slaughtered in accordance with the rules governing slaughtering and processing of carcasses that were going to be sold. The changed legislation will now allow the person who is the licensed operator of the cervid farm to slaughter the animals on his or her own farm for personal use, which is to say a use that falls outside the Meat Inspection Act.

Closely related to the on-farm slaughter changes is the ribbon branding of the carcass. Carcass ribbon branding isn't the hot branding of a live animal for identification purposes. The carcass is ribbon branded with ink to identify it and ensure that the provincial

and federal approval stamps are evident. Current levels of inspection and food safety standards provide adequate levels of protections to ensure that meat from wild big game does not enter the domestic meat market unlawfully.

Mr. Speaker, there also have been other minor changes to the act. These include allowing cervid farm operators to submit their records and reports to Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development either electronically or through hard copy. This amendment fits in with the Alberta government one-window approach. It makes it easier for producers to keep their paperwork in order. There have also been changes to the eligibility for a licence to operate a cervid farm.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, as you can see, these amendments are small but important steps in helping our diversified livestock industry move forward. There is still much work to be done, and I know that our producers, who are the best in the world, will continue to meet any challenges they face and succeed. In order to ensure that Alberta's diversified livestock industry remains sustainable over the long term, I encourage all members of this Assembly to support this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Carlson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Happy to have an opportunity to speak to Bill 34, the Livestock Industry Diversification Amendment Act, 2003. I'm surprised that the Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar is delighted to introduce this bill because it looks like he got the short end of the straw on the last two bills, both being bills that pay homage to industry and don't really do what we need them . . . [interjection] Would you like to put that on the record there, hon. minister? Both of these bills are patchwork solutions to industry lobby, not the requirements of Albertans or other consumers who are looking to use these products or are speaking against these products for some reason.

The Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar talked about the extensive consultation they did with the industry, but what about the consultation you should have done with all the other groups who are also directly affected by the decisions you make with this particular industry? I didn't hear you say anything about them. When I take a look at the consultation that we did, I can see that some people are very, very concerned about what's happened here, not the least of which is the Canadian Wildlife Federation, who we wouldn't normally say is a really extremely green group, so you wouldn't normally think that they'd be speaking out against government actions, but they certainly have a strong perspective on game farming and on where this particular bill takes us.

So if we take a look at the bill, it looks to me like it's a hodge-podge of combining more responsibility for livestock owners and, at the same time, less in some cases. We see that the bill loosens up the way an operator can get rid of his cervid while laying out more explicitly how that happens, and it looks like it puts together a framework where people can be operating hunt farms without actually being registered as hunt farm owners, so we need some of that information discussed in this particular House.

This is a bill that deals with both the slaughtering of the animals and the consumption of the animals and the transportation of the cervids. We've heard for years in this Assembly how game farm operators are not taking wildlife from the wild to integrate into their own stock and boosting their stock or increasing the base that they can raise them from. Yet the member who introduced this bill said that that's exactly what they were doing, and now this bill brings in changes so that that can't happen anymore. So which was it? It

didn't happen before or it happened frequently before? It's hard to trust what this government is saying with regard to this.

This is an industry, this hunt farm industry, where we've seen millions drop out of the industry in the past couple of years. A couple of reasons. There's a lack of interest in buying the meat. There are the costs and perceptions of dangers to humans from infested cervids with a variety of different kinds of diseases. There's been a huge increase in the number of operators in the province, and we've seen over the last few years millions of dollars being paid out to game farmers in compensation for necessary eradication procedures when these animals get diseases. It didn't go into taxpayers' hands. It went to these operators who were set up by the government in the first place to put these farms in place, and now we're seeing another level of legislation to assist them further. So it's interesting to see what's happening here.

What has happened in the most recent history is that we see that with the drought many of the game farm operators have found it difficult to keep their animals, and we've seen some threats of them being let into the wild. Apparently, this legislation is supposed to try to deal with that issue instead of just severely fining the people when you find out who they're registered to, which is possible with the kind of branding that's done. Then there's the other side of the concern, where we see the operators apparently slaughtering animals on a larger than average basis to cull their herds. So what's happening here, then, is we're seeing more of the animals being sent in for testing for CWD, chronic wasting disease, even when the game farm operators are saying that they don't believe they have it on their land, but they're slaughtering the animals and sending them in for testing. That is a cheap way to cull their herds. What we see are more expenses put on the operators' side, who have to pay for the testing, and no logical reason for having done that.

What we see really is an industry that is at the end of its rope who is trying to salvage what they can out of something that was artificially built up by this government in the first place, and now the government is once again bailing them out in a number of areas. So I have a lot of questions about this particular piece of legislation.

I think this is two in a row. He's batting zero both times, on bills 33 and 34, Mr. Speaker, and perhaps in the next session Drayton Valley-Calmar can get a little better legislation to introduce, because these two are crummy pieces of legislation and neither of them deserve the support of anyone in this House.

Some Hon. Members: Question.

The Deputy Speaker: Ready for the question? Well, I have two members wishing to speak. Inasmuch as the hon. member wants to ask questions or make comments, it's only been the second person that's spoken. So you'd have to be the third. Then Edmonton-Highlands on Bill 34.

Mr. Mason: I am pleased to speak to Bill 34, the Livestock Industry Diversification Amendment Act, 2003. This bill makes an attempt to prevent the mixing of domesticated and wild cervid animals such as elk and deer by strictly prohibiting their release into the wild and regulating the conditions under which they're slaughtered. Cervid harvest preserves, as shooting galleries for domesticated animals are called, will continue to be illegal as only the game farm producer will be allowed to slaughter the animals and then only for personal use. Furthermore, such animals will no longer be kept "captive"; they will be "in a domesticated condition," which I am sure they will appreciate, Mr. Speaker.

The government has, I think, made a real mess of this industry, Mr. Speaker, and it's finally come crashing down with the slaughter of these animals. The government attempts to bill the act as

reducing the regulatory burden for the diversified livestock industry, but according to the Alberta Wilderness Association the government is desperate to prop up an untenable industry which should actually be dismantled immediately. It was only when we got cases of chronic wasting disease that the government finally decided that something had to be done. Then at that point people wanted to promote the use of penned hunts.

10:30

Last year's drought, Mr. Speaker, raised the spectre of ranchers releasing domesticated cervid animals into the wild. This, of course, raised the risk of adding to the spread of foot-and-mouth disease and other illnesses. So it's important that domestic-in-the-wild cervids should be strictly prohibited. However, while the government is attempting to close the pen door, many of the animals have already escaped. I think that the government has made a real mess and is now trying to fix it. I made that comment, hon. members, not to be taken literally; it was in speaking more rhetorically. The government has created a very, very bad situation in their misguided attempts to diversify agriculture in this province.

I think that the Livestock Industry Diversification Act can be supported as long as we bear in mind that it is almost a deathbed confession of the industry and a confession of the government's failure in respect to cervids in the agricultural policy that they've set out.

So with those comments, Mr. Speaker, I will take my place.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments under 29(2)?

[Motion carried; Bill 34 read a second time]

Bill 36

Environmental Protection and Enhancement Amendment Act, 2003

Dr. Taylor: Due to the lateness of the hour, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to be relatively brief in my comments. That's to reassure everybody.

Essentially, the bill does several things. It allows Alberta Environment to adopt and enforce consistent provincewide standards through codes of practice. I had a discussion and had some concern raised about reporting, and there was some concern that the results might just be reported verbally. That was a concern that was raised at an earlier meeting. In that earlier meeting we assured the people we were talking with at the time that we didn't know exactly what the comment was in the bill, but we clarified that issue.

I need to move second reading, which I've done. Thank you.

What this bill does as well is allow the companies to report electronically. As well as traditional methodologies, it allows electronic reporting, which is quicker.

If I might give a quick example of why codes of practice are important, Mr. Speaker, we might take an application for a gravel pit that comes into Alberta Environment. I want to assure all members that every application will continue to be reviewed individually, as will every reclamation certificate. So a gravel pit operator makes an application for a gravel pit. What we want to do in the permit of approval is we want to put in the codes of practice that regard the operation and the reclamation of that site. This will very clearly indicate to the operators up front and beforehand what they must do, so they cannot come back to Alberta Environment after and say: well, you didn't say this, and you didn't say that, and we didn't expect this, and we didn't expect that. It'll be very clear up front to the public what the code of practice is, to the gravel pit operator what the code of practice is, and to the people in the affected area what the reclamation must be.

As well, Mr. Speaker, this bill allows for any violation of the code of practice to be enforced with an EPO, environmental protection order. So it strengthens the hand of Alberta Environment in getting these reclamations completed at the end when the pit has to be reclaimed. We can say: "Well, look back at your approval. Your approval says that you must do such and such. Now you must do it, and if you don't do it, we can immediately go to an EPO, which will shorten drastically the reclamation time."

Mr. Speaker, there's going to be plenty of time to debate this bill during second reading and as we go forward in the House, and I will have the opportunity to comment further. With that, I'll conclude my comments this evening.

Mr. Broda: Mr. Speaker, this is indeed an interesting bill that does require further study and discussion. However, at this point I would like to adjourn debate on Bill 36.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 37

Climate Change and Emissions Management Act

Dr. Taylor: I'm pleased to move Bill 37, Mr. Speaker.

Like with Bill 36, again because of the hour I'll be relatively brief in my comments. As I said earlier, as we move forward, there'll be plenty of time for all members including myself to debate, so just a few comments.

As you know, this government is firmly committed to taking action on climate change. Bill 37, the Climate Change and Emissions Management Act, will enable the province to set regulations to

allow us to put many of the key areas of our plan into law. It allows us to set targets, negotiate sectoral agreements; provides a flexible tool kit on how to meet these targets; and facilitates private-sector investment in technology and deployment in energy efficiency. Bill 37 also clearly reinforces our position that the government of Alberta on behalf of all Albertans owns and is responsible for the exploration, development, and production of natural resources in the province.

With that brief summary, Mr. Speaker, I'll conclude my remarks this evening and look forward to making further remarks at an earlier hour.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Redwater.

Mr. Broda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This bill, just as the previous bill, is a very interesting bill and requires further study and debate. At this time I would like to adjourn debate on Bill 37.

Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

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

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's been a very interesting evening of great progress, and therefore I would move that the House now stand adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; at 10:40 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

