

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Thursday, November 20, 2003** **1:30 p.m.**
 Date: 2003/11/20
 [The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

The Deputy Speaker: Let us pray. Heavenly Father, as we conclude this week's deliberations and return to our constituencies, we pray that we will be renewed and strengthened in our commitments to better serve our constituents and all Albertans. Amen.
 Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister of human resources.

Mr. Dunford: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you today the government relations staff of the Workers' Compensation Board. As MLAs will attest, there are better relations that are taking place now between individual MLAs and the WCB, and the people that are responsible for that, of course, are led by Jordan Cleland and his staff of Kathleen Ruelling and Sarah Stevenson. I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

Mr. Lougheed: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly two groups today. First of all, from James Mowat school in Fort Saskatchewan. Accompanying these students are Mr. Fellows, Mrs. Kondro, and Mrs. Webster and parent helpers Mr. Babichuk, Mr. John Enns, a former principal and colleague of mine, Mrs. Geary, Mrs. Cockburn, Mrs. Conroy, Mrs. Schneider, and Mr. MacDonald. I'd ask that they please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

A second introduction, from Wye school. The teachers are Ms Janet Manson, Mrs. Allison Baker, and Mrs. Tanya Jordan, accompanied by Mrs. Debbie Beckwith and Mr. Stan Plociennik. I'd ask that these students and parents and teachers please rise and be recognized by the Assembly.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am just delighted to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of students in the career options for new Canadians program at NorQuest College, which is located in my constituency. Here today is Ms Bev Cooper, who is the instructor for the class, and nine students. I've been out to talk to this class. They are very keen on current affairs, and they're also all looking forward to voting in the next series of elections. I would ask them to please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very, very pleased to introduce to you and through you to the House three outstanding young individual Albertans. I'll introduce the first two, ask them to rise, and then ask the House to welcome them. The first two are Tracey Nicholson, a social work student at Grant MacEwan College who is presently working in the Edmonton-Highlands constituency as part of her practicum experience. Her colleague Raul Rodas is also a social work student at Grant MacEwan College, and I have the pleasure of having him in my constituency office assisting with the

day-to-day work. I would ask both of them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, my third guest, who I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly, is Ms Melanee Thomas, executive director of the Council of Alberta University Students. The Council of Alberta University Students represents over 80,000 undergraduate students in this province, and Ms Thomas has been working very hard on behalf of this association to generate a debate on Bill 43, which is before the House now. I will now ask Ms Thomas to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: **Ministerial Statements**

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development.

Heritage Classic Organizing Committee

Mr. Norris: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise on this beautiful Alberta day as a proud Edmontonian to talk about the outstanding work of the organizing committee of the Heritage Classic, that's happening this weekend in Edmonton. This weekend's Heritage Classic celebrates the presence of many of Edmonton's great hockey heroes, including Wayne Gretzky and Mark Messier. Together, the players that are entering into Edmonton's realm have won a combined 127 Stanley Cups among them.

The game will shine an international spotlight on the city of Edmonton and the province of Alberta, and, Mr. Speaker, at the same time this game will generate an enormous amount of media attention not only in Edmonton, Alberta, but in North America and around the world. You cannot buy this kind of media exposure, and not only is this celebration a great event for the city of Edmonton, Alberta, but the economic impacts have been huge. [interjection] I will tell you how good it is. For example, it is expected that the economic impact will be similar to last year's Grey Cup, which was in the \$20 million to \$25 million range to the city of Edmonton. Furthermore, hotel rooms, according to all accounts, are fully booked for this weekend's event.

But interest in this game stretches far beyond Edmonton and Alberta, Mr. Speaker. The Edmonton Oilers estimate that one-quarter of the people who attend the game on Saturday will be from out of province, and the Oilers have issued an unprecedented 350 media passes for a game which would normally see 50 media passes asked for. That's more coverage than the final for the Stanley Cup, and media have joined us from as far away as Finland.

Mr. Speaker, I as an Edmontonian and I know all the others in the caucus are so proud of the efforts of the Heritage Classic organizing committee and its chairman, Mr. Doug Goss, and the volunteers of this great city who have made this event happen. I congratulate them before the event happens on what I know will be a spectacular job, and I will join my fellow Edmontonians and Albertans in cheering on the Oilers in victory in the alumni game and the game on Saturday night.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Bonner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Almost every Albertan can remember throwing on a parka and heading down to the corner rink or nearest pond and playing shinny on a cold afternoon. Usually you'd just throw your sticks in the middle, blindfold one player, and he'd throw the sticks from side to side to pick teams. There were no refs, no time-outs, and sometimes the net just consisted of two boots, but you were Wayne Gretzky or Guy Lafleur for that day on a small, frozen patch of ice.

These fond memories are going to be played out before us in a larger-than-life fashion at the Heritage Classic. This outside game will definitely be a spectacle with not only two of the most famous franchises in the NHL's history having a match but also the megastar matchup between the former stars of both teams that will precede the game. With players like Guy Lafleur, Larry Robinson, and Kirk Muller on the Habs side matching up against Oiler all-stars Wayne Gretzky, Mark Messier, and Paul Coffey, the game is going to be as good as any hockey fan could imagine.

This event is a first in the NHL, and we'd like to recognize the tremendous amount of effort by all parties involved in getting this off the ground. The international exposure that Edmonton will receive will be a major boost for the economy and an excellent way to showcase the city. This hockey game is just a culmination of a number of events that start the day and go on throughout the weekend so that everyone should and will get the chance to take part in the magic.

Thank you very much.

1:40head: Oral Question Period

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

Electricity Deregulation

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Support for this government continues to short-circuit. Today at the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties a resolution presented by Parkland county was carried by a vast majority of those in attendance. Part of this resolution reads:

Alberta's farmers, businesses, industry, residents and not-for-profit groups have faced hardships through higher annual energy costs, inconsistent provincial rebate programs, unfair and inefficient billing procedures and uncertainty in market supplies and contracts.

My first question is to the Minister of Energy. Why is this government continuing to ignore this group of rural leaders who request that the government of Alberta abandon and reverse the process of deregulation of utilities?

Mr. Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, I was at the AAMD and C this morning. I didn't see the member there, but I did answer the one question that was put to me in the bear pit, and then I was notified of the resolution. In fact, individuals in the Aquila network have paid the highest prices for the last two years. They have the highest deferral accounts in Alberta.

An Hon. Member: That's EPCOR.

Mr. Smith: That's the Aquila network with EPCOR being a retail provider.

Not only, Mr. Speaker, have they had that charge on them, but they've also been plagued by commercial incompetency. They've had difficulties with meter reads. They've had difficulty matching distribution charges with the time that they bill the energy.

We are also at the end of that. This is the last 40 days of deferral accounts in that network and, as a matter of fact, all of Alberta with the exception of Enmax, Calgary. EPCOR has filed a rate bringing the price down by over a half-cent, and that alone is going to make substantial savings. So these people can look forward to as much as a 20 to 25 percent reduction.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay. Thank you. The first supplemental if it hasn't been answered yet.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: why is this government continuing to spend \$3 million on a propaganda campaign that attacks the sovereignty and the self-sufficiency of an Alberta tradition that works, rural utilities?

Mr. Smith: Mr. Speaker, there is so much fabrication in that preamble in that question that it really doesn't represent a question that could be logically answered.

Mr. MacDonald: Again to the same minister, Mr. Speaker: given that the economic boondoggle that has been electricity deregulation has already cost Alberta consumers over \$8 billion, how much longer will this government force higher energy costs on Alberta consumers before you unplug deregulation?

Mr. Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, the economic boondoggle that sits in Alberta happens to be that this is the fastest growing economic jurisdiction in North America. When this growth started, there was a report out that said: how much electricity will you need? And it said: the amount of electricity that you're using today, in 2003, you will need in 2014. So, in fact, 45 percent new load growth supporting the fastest growing economic jurisdiction in North America has been put here on time and inside a price envelope that can be afforded by Albertans.

There have been difficulties in the consumer marketplace. We're working very hard to correct them. But deregulation, competitive generation has allowed Alberta to grow, unlike Saskatchewan, Manitoba, British Columbia, which have been choked off by the fact of socialist regulation.

The Deputy Speaker: Second main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Electricity Prices

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My second question this afternoon is quite interesting. It's a comparison. Now, this document is an economic assessment from this particular government prior to 1993, when the current Premier was elected and the interprovincial industrial electricity prices for this province are the cheapest in Canada. Now, yesterday or the day before another utility study was issued, and it indicates that we have some of the highest electricity prices in North America. My first question is to the Minister of Energy. He may not want to answer, but how do you explain that this study indicates that Edmonton, Alberta, has the second highest electricity prices for residential customers in Canada? If electricity deregulation is working so well, explain that.

Mr. Smith: Mr. Speaker, how can the member explain the fact that British Columbia has a \$7 billion debt on their hydro? How can the member explain that Manitoba, that's going probably 10 percent over the last four years, is swimming in a sea of red ink and they have a \$7 billion debt that their taxpayers are going to have to pay for? He's very comfortable taxing tomorrow's Albertans, very comfortable, but we're not.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: given that the average price for large power customers in Vancouver is 4 cents a kilowatt, in Regina it's 5 cents a kilowatt, in Winnipeg it's 3 cents a kilowatt, and in Edmonton it's 7 cents a kilowatt, how much longer before you unplug electricity deregulation and restore our economic advantage? These are the statistics, and you can't hide from them.

Mr. Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, I mean, the answers are so obvious. I know he wants to talk about the one or two large users left in Manitoba. I know he wants to talk about the highest tax rate in Canada, in Manitoba. I know he wants to talk about a sales tax in British Columbia. I know they want to talk about the tremendous amount of debt left to those provinces.

You know, we're not going to dwell in the past, because we're the fastest growing economic jurisdiction in North America. It's been put forward by a number of groups that we're going to grow again, yet at the same time the Royal Bank comes out and says: "Where's the second most affordable jurisdiction to buy a house in Canada? Alberta." And that includes utility rates.

Mr. MacDonald: That is, Mr. Speaker, if you don't want to turn your lights on.

Now to the Minister of Economic Development: will you conduct a study, please, on behalf of the citizens of this province to just prove once and for all how much of our economic advantage has been eroded because of high electricity costs for power users in both small and large accounts?

Mr. Norris: You know, Mr. Speaker, I've been jumping to get up here. Thank you for the question, hon. member, because you are so wrong, so wrong.

Let me tell you exactly what we do. If the hon. member took the time to read the reports that our department produces, he would know that KPMG does an annual study about the cost comparative between seven cities in Canada and seven in the United States, all of medium to large size of Edmonton. Every single time Edmonton and Calgary come out number one or two. Lethbridge comes out number one in small; Medicine Hat, number two.

I would like to talk for a moment, Mr. Speaker, about reality. I want to talk about reality, about what we don't say as the government, what other people are saying about Alberta. The TD Financial Group says that the Alberta Calgary/Edmonton corridor has the potential to become the most prosperous place in North America. The Bank of Montreal describes the Alberta government as a fiscal paragon of virtue, and the Conference Board of Canada metropolitan outlook for Alberta says that it will lead the nation again . . . [interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie. [interjections]

Automobile Insurance Rates

Ms Carlson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks for all of your support.

Mr. Speaker, under the government's auto insurance plan it won't matter if you're male or female, 16 or 60, married or single, but if you're from Edmonton, you'll pay more than any other Albertan. Again Edmonton government MLAs have failed this city. My questions are to the Minister of Economic Development. Given this minister's willingness to study the economic impact of consolidating Edmonton's airports, will he study the economic impact of charging Edmontonians more for auto insurance than any other Albertan?

1:50

Mr. Norris: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't even know where to begin. The inferences in the question to Edmonton MLAs not standing up for Edmonton is absolute poppycock. Absolute poppycock. As a result, we have through the hard work of the Member for Medicine Hat and the Finance minister worked out a program to realize that the actuarial function of Edmonton versus Calgary has been worked

in and will be phased out over the next three years to level the playing field. In actual fact, if we wanted to get involved in managing insurance companies, which we don't, then we would do what the hon. member is suggesting. We are not going to do that; we're going to let the market decide.

Ms Carlson: Mr. Speaker, we want to talk about auto insurance rates before the next election. Will this minister tell us why he and his Edmonton colleagues could not stop the government from punishing Edmontonians with higher auto insurance rates than for any other Albertan?

Mr. Norris: It would appear to me that my answer flew right over the heads of the opposition, Mr. Speaker, so I'll try again. The bottom line is that we do not get involved in telling insurance companies the actuarial responsibilities they have. We do fight vigorously to say that if we are not looking at leveling the playing field in certain areas, then we'll do it in others, but in this particular case we have a commitment from this government to over the next three years level that playing field. I can tell you that every single one of the Edmonton colleagues as well as every colleague in here fought for that.

The Deputy Speaker: To supplement, the hon. Minister of Finance.

Mrs. Nelson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to briefly supplement the answer from the Minister of Economic Development. I can tell you very clearly that the MLAs from the capital region have been very, very forthright in coming forward in this new package and making sure that everyone in this province is dealt with fairly and in particular have represented their ridings and have led the way to help us put in place a structure that takes us down from four regional areas to, in fact, three regional areas but keeps in mind the fact that the actuarial assessments that have occurred clearly show that in the past – in the past – the claims experience in Edmonton has in fact been higher than other jurisdictions within the province. That is balancing off and, therefore, has allowed us to move to a system that will bring us into three geographical areas, and that has been brought forward by our entire caucus.

Speaker's Ruling Improper Questions

The Deputy Speaker: Before recognizing the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, just a reminder that question period is designed to bring the government, which is the cabinet, to account for what they're doing. It's not to bring the caucus to account. Many of the answers, although helpful, really were responding to a question that was inappropriate.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Automobile Insurance Rates (continued)

Ms Carlson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that even the insurance industry is against this government's plan, isn't it time for a better plan? Why don't you just adopt a public insurance plan like we've been asking for?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance. [interjections] The hon. member, I'm sure, realizes that usually the question goes to the minister responsible for that avenue of concern. The direction goes to whomever, and in this case it's the Minister of Finance.

Mrs. Nelson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This group across the way has been promoting government insurance and the government getting into the business of business. We are not in that mode on our side of the House. We believe that the industry can operate fairly and equitably within this province. Is the industry angry with some of the reforms? Yes. Are the accident lawyers angry with some of the reforms? Yes. Are the consumers going to be happy? Yes.

So, obviously, we are moving in the right direction because we are dealing with the obligation we have to the consumers to make sure that we have a fair, accessible, affordable, and comparably priced insurance package within this province, and that's the package we've put forward. I know the opposition party doesn't like that because they want government insurance. We're not going down that path, Mr. Speaker. We're going to have the private sector deliver insurance to the people of this province.

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

Energy Deregulation (continued)

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today the overwhelming majority of delegates at the annual convention of municipal districts and counties have sent a clear message to this government: abandon and reverse disastrous deregulation policy. The Tory government's foray into deregulation can be summed up by the five Cs: crisis, confusion, chaos, conflict, and confrontation. My question is to the Minister of Energy. Will the government turn its back on the five Cs and abandon and reverse deregulation of Alberta's electricity and natural gas utilities, and if not, why not? A clear answer.

Mr. Smith: Mr. Speaker, if it weren't so corny, concealed, coagulated, covert, and clandestine an attack by the other member, I would gladly respond to it. Just because the third party took claim to leaking the report of the Advisory Council on Electricity, I would direct the member – I guess he was busy leaking and didn't have time to do some reading – to read page 1, that says, "Specifically, the Council recommends that the government develop a clear game plan for the next . . . five years and stick to it," looking for that kind of certainty.

We're responding to those reports, Mr. Speaker. We're responding to the work that over 800 Albertans supplied to the Advisory Council on Electricity, the good work of the people on that advisory committee, the good work by the members for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne and Leduc on this. So that is one area we take our direction from. Of course, we're going to listen to what the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties have said to us, but, you know, it's a large issue, and the good part of it is that there's power here, there's economic growth here, people are buying houses, land prices are increasing, and I'm glad that we have this item to discuss.

The Deputy Speaker: First supplemental, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A second question to the same minister. I hope this time he'll listen more carefully. If he thinks that everything is hunky-dory, as he claims, then why did the overwhelming majority of delegates at the AAMDC convention urge the government and him to abandon and reverse utility deregulation? Why are they saying this to you?

Mr. Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, probably the same reason as why they asked me one question in a bear-pit session that lasted over an hour.

The Deputy Speaker: Final supplemental.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the more reasonable member of the front benches there, the Deputy Premier of the province of Alberta. Why is the government refusing to listen to rural politicians, who know firsthand the hardships caused by the government's disastrous deregulation policies, Madam Minister?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, as a member of a rural community and as a representative of a rural community I know how important it is to have a safe, reliable supply of power. If I were the operator of a hog operation, who depends by the moment on power, of a feather industry, where 15 minutes out of power can devastate their whole livelihood, I would appreciate the fact that I have a safe, reliable source of power. I am not facing blackouts, brownouts, or rolling power outages in rural Alberta today, which, if any of us look back to prior to deregulation, was a very serious risk. In fact, many of the same media that write stories today about deregulation wrote stories about the looming brownouts. We appreciate having increased energy occurring. In fact, we in rural Alberta appreciate being contributors to a good environment by cogeneration through collecting methane from hog operations.

2:00

Mr. Speaker, I would really encourage the hon. member, instead of trying to find the narrow political issues, to look at the other half of the glass and see what has happened since power deregulation. Talk about wind energy, talk about bioenergy, talk about the investments that have been made in this province, and talk about the fact that the economic advantage in this province comes from the complete economy, not a single issue.

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

Edmonton City Centre Airport

Mr. Vandermeer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Media reports this morning are claiming that the province is intent on seizing the Edmonton City Centre Airport in an attempt to keep the Edmonton Regional Airports Authority from following through on its announced intention to cease all scheduled flights into the airport as of January 2005. My first question is for the Minister of Economic Development. Can the minister clarify just what the province's intentions are regarding the survival of Edmonton City Centre Airport?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Norris: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Before I give my answer, I would like to reiterate my thanks to the Member for Peace River and the Member for Lesser Slave Lake for all the work they've done on this particular file.

Mr. Speaker, I need to clarify that comments that were portrayed to say that the Alberta government is looking at seizing the airport are absolutely false. They were taken out of context, and they were not the comments we wanted to make. What we did want to talk about is the absolutely vital nature that this municipal airport plays in economic development not only in northern Alberta but in rural Alberta, in Lethbridge, Medicine Hat. To that end we feel that the airport authority needs to revisit the decision they made. To that end we are going to encourage them with every ounce of being we have to look at what it is they're doing and look at the great opportunity that exists with that airport.

In 1995, the year that the decision was reached to consolidate some air traffic, there were some 3 billion dollars' worth of projects on the books. There are now some 50 billion dollars, Mr. Speaker, and the majority of them are in northern Alberta. So we see this tool as vital not only for economic development in northern Alberta but for all of Alberta and most specifically rural Alberta.

Mr. Vandermeer: My final question is to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. Could the minister please explain who is on the government's committee and what they are looking at?

Ms Calahasen: Well, firstly, Mr. Speaker, our government recognizes the important role the city of Edmonton as well as the City Centre Airport play. I think it's really important for northern Alberta that whatever happens, we continue to work on this. As a result, the Minister of Economic Development and I will co-lead Infrastructure, Transportation, the chair of NADC, as well as Municipal Affairs to ensure that we continue to work with the city, the northern communities, and of course the members of NADC.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to talk about that because what we want to do is we want to bring people to the table, we want to hear their concerns, we want to gather information, but most of all we want to find solutions. I was so pleased to hear the other day that the mayor of Edmonton is supporting the continuation of scheduled aircraft at the airport, because Edmonton is the city of choice for northern communities and businesses and we want Edmonton to remain the gateway to the north, and I know Edmonton wants to remain the gateway to the north. Even the city's own audit echoes the saying that through the development of effective and actionable plans the operation of the City Centre Airport will continue to benefit the city, the region, and the province.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, I did hear you say that it was your final supplementary; right?

Mr. Vandermeer: Yes.

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

Postsecondary Tuition Fees

Dr. Massey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Students and parents are upset by the shift in government policy that will see these Albertans pay a larger portion of postsecondary school costs. It seems that for the government 30 percent is not enough. My questions are to the Minister of Learning. How much is enough, Mr. Minister? Is it 35 percent? Is it 40? Is it 50 percent? Just how much is enough?

Dr. Oberg: Mr. Speaker, as I related to the Legislative Assembly yesterday, the 30 percent tuition fee policy is still in place, and as was seen in the amendments that I brought before the House late last night, it is actually still in place. Where we ran into an issue was with those institutions that have already reached the 30 percent cap. The hon. member is fully aware that the reason they have reached the cap is because they were very good business managers, their expenses had gone down, and subsequently they were not allowed to increase their tuition.

The University of Lethbridge, for example, has frozen their tuition for two years. The Lethbridge Community College I believe is for three years. Mr. Speaker, it would be completely different if these institutions were higher than anywhere else in Alberta, but in reality they're significantly lower. As deemed in the *Maclean's* study, the

University of Lethbridge is 40th of 50 universities across the country as the cheapest university.

Mr. Speaker, these people want the room to be able to increase their financial resources. Despite the fact that their expenses are down, their productivity is up. What we have done in the new amendments that were tabled last night is we have put a cost of living plus 2 percent to a maximum of 5 percent per year if they do hit 30 percent. That is less than what the rate of tuition rises right now. The other key thing that must be said here is that the University of Calgary and the University of Alberta, which are our two largest institutions, are still sitting at about 23 or 24 percent and indeed probably will never hit 30 percent.

So, Mr. Speaker, the amendments that were put in last night are to benefit those institutions that have been excellent managers, that have had lower tuition and now are going to raise their tuition by, at most, 5 percent per year.

Dr. Massey: Well, Mr. Speaker, the question is: is there a cap? Is there a 30 percent cap?

Dr. Oberg: Mr. Speaker, for those institutions that are under 30 percent, there are specific guidelines or specific regulations that say that they can only increase their tuition by an average of \$276 in the upcoming year. For those institutions who have reached 30 percent, they can at most – at most – increase their tuition by 5 percent.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Massey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So the answer is: no, there's no cap.

When will Albertans see a long-term plan for funding our postsecondary schools that will bring some stability to the amount contributed by students and parents?

Dr. Oberg: Last night.

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

Cull Cow and Bull Program

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In October Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development announced that they were negotiating with the federal government on a national cull cow and bull program to help the beef and dairy producers deal with the difficulties they continue to face as they cull their beef and dairy herds. Many of my constituents wonder when the joint federal/provincial program will be announced. My first question is for the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. Minister, what kind of update can you provide concerning the national cull cow and bull program?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, we understand from statements that were made by Minister Vanclief the day before yesterday that they will be proceeding with announcing a federal cull cow and bull program, and that may be exactly what they will announce. I prefer to talk about a mature market animal program, and that will be what we talk about. It is our understanding that this program and the details of this program will be announced officially tomorrow.

The Deputy Speaker: First supplemental.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: well,

what has the industry said that it needs with regard to a cull cow and bull program?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, we've worked over the last several weeks, actually, with the industry on how to deal with these mature market animals. As most know, with this animal prior to May 20 the majority of that product went into the U.S. As of May 20 none of that product can go into the U.S., and it isn't expected that it can for some time. So the industry along with our caucus have talked about how to deal with this issue on a long-term basis. The industry and we agree that there are a number of things that you need. The first is a home for the product, for a product that used to have a different home. The second thing is that you have to have slaughter facilities for this product, and the third thing you need to have is a market for the product. Our industry and this government are very, very concerned about, again, interfering in the marketplace in a negative way.

2:10

The Deputy Speaker: Final supplemental.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's November 20. My producers have been waiting for five months. When can producers expect details of this Alberta program?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I have been waiting for five weeks to convince the rest of Canada, including the government of Canada, that we should have some principles behind dealing with mature market animals. Those principles first and foremost should be to deal with a market reality. Well, five weeks later I have failed to receive support from the federal government, some support from the government of British Columbia, which I think understands the marketing situation, and very little from the rest of Canada.

Obviously, there's no question that this is a major issue for us. We carry about 50 percent of the breeding stock in Canada in this province, so it is a big issue for us. We are still hopeful that sometime this afternoon, tonight, or tomorrow morning the federal government will recognize the marketplace in what they do and we could join in a national program. However, Mr. Speaker, failing that, producers in this province will know on Monday the details of the Alberta program.

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

Charles Camsell Hospital

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Liberal opposition has learned recently that a deal for selling the former Charles Camsell hospital in Edmonton may close within the next few days. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Is the minister aware of plans by the proposed owners to provide health services at the former Charles Camsell hospital?

Mr. Mar: Mr. Speaker, I have not been apprised of what appears to be a private transaction with an offer that has been made by an individual or a corporation that's not known to me. It would not come within my scope of knowledge. It wouldn't be within my jurisdiction to seek such information.

The Deputy Speaker: First supplemental, hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So, then, what assurances can the minister give Edmontonians that the Camsell will not just become another example of a public health facility being shut down

only to be reopened by a private operator providing insured health services?

Mr. Mar: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member well knows about our public health legislation which prohibits private hospitals from operating in the province of Alberta, but there's nothing wrong with private surgical facilities being set up by individuals who wish to do certain types of procedures. Not major surgeries, which can only be done in a public hospital, but there are many procedures that can be done in private surgical facilities that can provide insured services to individuals. They cannot charge such individuals, but they can provide such services under contract to a regional health authority. He well knows that there are many such contracts within the province of Alberta for the provision of such services.

The Deputy Speaker: Final supplemental, Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that the Minister of Infrastructure has stated in this House that the Camsell is, quote, not suitable for long-term care, end quote, will the minister confirm that publicly contracted long-term care services will not be provided at the Camsell?

Mr. Mar: I can't possibly tell members of this House what the plans are for such a person who may or may not be buying, for a deal which may or may not be closing, for a deal that may or may not be in the works. I would presume that if such an individual or corporate entity were to come forward and buy such a facility as the Camsell, they would have in their plans renovations that would make it suitable for whatever services or use that they choose to use it for.

Mr. Speaker, this is a perfectly hypothetical question that is not about government policy per se, which is the purpose of question period. I need not remind the hon. member of that. We do not delve into the private affairs of corporations that wish to make a commercial transaction on a facility.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Grande Cache Sawmill Closure

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Weyerhaeuser in Grande Cache recently announced that they will be closing their mill on February 8, 2004. This is a huge blow to the community, with over 156 employees losing their mill jobs. My questions are to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Can the minister tell the Assembly: what are some of the challenges that the forest sector is facing right now that would have contributed to this decision?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development.

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That is a very, very good question. As I've indicated before in this House, forestry continues to be a very important part of our overall economic diversification plan in Alberta. In fact, up to 50 communities in Alberta depend on forestry as their major source of income.

Dr. Taylor: How many?

Mr. Cardinal: For over 50 communities a major source of income and, also, job creation. In this particular case, Grande Cache happens to be one of those communities, and it's a community that cannot stand the loss of that many jobs.

What we are doing, Mr. Speaker, is that I've asked my department to look at the reasons why the company is saying that it's not economically viable to operate with 130 million board feet. As a person that was involved in forestry in my previous life, I generally have a good handle on the situation. What I intend to do once I get the status report from the department as to what distance the trees have to be hauled, the size of the trees, and the way the mill is set up in that town is that I will then go over and spend some time and tour the area to determine what we will do from there on.

The Deputy Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary question is to the same minister. Three years ago the mine in Grande Cache closed down. Now this. For a town of this size these layoffs are really difficult. What is being done to deal with these workers?

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As the member is aware, we did meet with the company officials from Weyerhaeuser yesterday, and they've agreed that they will do anything they can to ensure that a certain number of jobs are retained in Grande Cache. They may not be at exactly the same mill that's there, but we will look at other options. In addition to that, I know that the Premier has contacted the town and advised them that there are a number of ministers that will be working on the issue along with the MLA from that riding, of course.

The Deputy Speaker: Final supplemental, West Yellowhead.

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental question is to the same minister. What is going to be done with the wood supply in the forest management agreement for this area?

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. There is, of course, a clause in the forest management agreement that after 15 months or so if the company does not come up with a different solution in relation to harvesting the forest and also processing the forest in that particular setting, the government has the option to take over the wood supply and possibly reallocate it to another, more viable process of job creation.

Calgary Courthouse

Mr. Bonner: Mr. Speaker, plans to have a private consortium build and operate a new courthouse in Calgary have continued to move forward despite concerns from Alberta's top judges. My question is to the Minister of Infrastructure. Is the minister aware that one of the firms in the GCK Consortium, Great West Life Realty, is affiliated with Great West Life and its subsidiaries, which have been involved in more than 700 legal actions before the Calgary courts in recent years?

Mr. Lund: Well, Mr. Speaker, as the Attorney General for the province clearly outlined yesterday, there was no problem with the justice system operating in a building that happens to be owned and operated by the private sector. As a matter of fact, the Court of Appeal today is in a building owned by a private company. So I don't know why I would be searching to find out if the people that are financing and/or have got something to do with a project happened to have been in court.

2:20

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice to supplement.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the hon. member should be aware that no one is before the courts of this province more often than the government of Alberta, both on behalf of the people of Alberta prosecuting under the Criminal Code and under other provincial offences and both as a plaintiff and as a defendant, and there has never been a question about whether or not the fact that the government operated and ran the buildings in this province that the courts operate in impeded the independence of the courts in terms of matters before the courts. The government of Alberta is before the courts more often than any other party.

Mr. Bonner: To the Minister of Infrastructure: given that private companies with potential conflicts of interest will be handling security responsibilities and the management of sensitive documents at the Calgary courthouse under the P3 model, how can this possibly maintain public confidence in the courts?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, this is a very prime example of that opposition continually making comments about things that they have not investigated, that they've not researched, nor have they ever taken the time to try to look into these kinds of situations. The fact is that the security will be handled in that building similar to security in any other courthouse that we operate, and it will fall under the Solicitor General similar to the way it is today. That will not change.

Mr. Bonner: To the same minister: will the minister, then, table a detailed business plan that outlines measures to deal with potential conflicts of interest arising from the involvement of private companies in the project?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, the whole issue about security in any facility regardless of the owner – I just don't understand why these people can't get it through their thick skulls that, in fact, there are things like security that we are not putting out to the private sector. They stay in with the Solicitor General, and that's not changing just because someone happens to own the bricks and mortar of the facility.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. minister, the Chamber is inhabited by people who are elected members, and the thickness of their skulls is not really the issue. They have the right to ask questions.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Automobile Insurance Rates

(continued)

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's now clear that the promise to roll back insurance rates to levels found in other western provinces was nothing more than the usual hot air we're used to getting from the Premier. The insurance plan released yesterday will, if everything goes well, roll back rates by, at best, 12 percent. To the Minister of Finance: given that rates increased by 57 percent last year alone, why is the government conceding that it is powerless to reverse the gouging that occurred last year when private insurance took Alberta drivers to the cleaners?

Mrs. Nelson: Well, Mr. Speaker, we did not put forward a plan to roll back insurance rates. What we put forward was a plan that recognized that we had some difficulties with increased insurance rates, particularly in the automobile sector, but it had to deal with a whole restructuring of our insurance delivery program, because we found that there was poor accessibility, our prices were high, and we were not comparable to other jurisdictions. So we embarked on a

program that would in fact move Alberta into a position that would give us accessibility, where people would not be denied access to insurance, where people would be able to buy insurance at a price that would not preclude them from buying it, so it would be affordable, and we would have a comparable price mechanism within this province in comparison to the other jurisdictions on either side.

That's the program we embarked on, and we also put an added element in there that I think is very important, that puts some personal responsibility into the mix, and said: if you're a good driver, you're going to be rewarded, and if you're a bad driver, you're going to be penalized because we don't want bad drivers on the roads. It's as simple a case as that. That's what we put forward. We didn't adopt anybody else's plan. We made our own plan here in Alberta, and the Member for Medicine Hat has spent since July with a team of people to implement a process that will get us to the point where we deliver that to the consumers of the province of Alberta.

The Deputy Speaker: First supplemental.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: how will the government's plan bring rates in line with other western provinces, as the Premier promised, given that rates in Alberta are 40 percent higher than in B.C., 51 percent higher than in Saskatchewan, and 57 percent higher than in Manitoba?

Mrs. Nelson: Well, Mr. Speaker, we will be introducing in this House very quickly a piece of legislation that will deal with the detailed particulars of how we will accomplish this, but in the short we recognized that in order to bring down premiums, we had to do a balancing act, and we said that in order to bring down our premiums so we had affordable premiums and comparable premiums, we had to remove roughly \$250 million out of the system.

So the balancing act was to redesign the benefit side of the equation, and that we have done, and that's how you attain the reduction and enhance the benefits and make it affordable and accessible for Albertans. As the legislation comes forward in the next week, I'm sure that the hon. member will see a little clearer picture as to how that's going to happen. I think that, quite frankly, the job we had, again, was to have accessibility, affordability, and comparable pricing, and I believe that with the package we will be bringing forward, it will accomplish just that.

The Deputy Speaker: Final supplemental.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the minister clearly cannot find any way to bring rates down to the level of provinces with public insurance, can she tell this House one good reason why her government won't consider – won't even consider – a public insurance system?

Mrs. Nelson: Well, Mr. Speaker, let's go back again. I just finished saying in the previous supplementary answer that we have put forward a plan that will see \$250 million coming out of the premium side of the equation. That will be going back to consumers to lower premiums, and that will in fact go back to consumers in our new reformed insurance package.

The decision that we made as a government was to put a program in place, again, that will provide for accessibility, affordability, and comparability but at the same time will put personal responsibility into the mix. We made a conscious decision as a government that we were not in favour of moving to government insurance. We felt that that was not the answer for Albertans, and as a result, unlike the

socialists over there, we said that this is a place where we believe that we are not in the business of being in business, and we would prefer to have, unlike what they would want, the private sector continue on to offer insurance coverage within this province.

Now, this is very important, Mr. Speaker, because what you have on either side of us, of course, are government insurance packages, and while they may be successful in some areas, we believe that we have had success with the private sector within this province, and we would like to see that relationship continue to grow and continue on to provide the kind of coverage that we want.

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

2:30 Provincial Fish and Wildlife Officers

Mr. Lord: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe that Albertans are very proud of our long history of resource management and conservation enforcement by our fish and wildlife officers, and I would like to see us maintain and even improve on that history. There have been some mixed reports lately, however, about our fish and wildlife division which are causing concern to some Albertans. My questions are to the Minister of Alberta Sustainable Resource Development. Mr. Minister, has there been a change in policy in your department such that the department no longer places the same value on the work of fish and wildlife officers as it once did?

Mr. Cardinal: No, Mr. Speaker. I've seen some reports from the media. There are really no reports out to indicate that we are mistreating employees. I believe this government understands that we do have, you know, a very efficient and effective public service here in Alberta, and we're proud of that. That's why we keep on getting elected: we have such good backup from the public service.

Mr. Speaker, in relation to the conservation or fish and wildlife officers, they're no different. They operate like other public servants, and we have high regard for our employees. In fact, I have 130 fish and wildlife officers in Alberta out of a staff of 2,000, and we do spend about \$37 million a year specifically for fish and wildlife operations. That budget has increased by \$700,000 in the past year. There are no layoffs, and we don't plan to lay off anyone.

The Deputy Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Lord: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: does the department have a thorough, well-established, and proper process to properly determine what funding should be allocated to officer patrols and poaching regulation enforcement?

Mr. Cardinal: Of course, Mr. Speaker. We do have to operate within our budget – each ministry does – and we have to be very efficient as to how taxpayer dollars are used. Department officials in each division are involved in the development of the plans for the yearly operations, and our budgets are based on that. Therefore, they are directly involved in planning and staffing of particular divisions.

Mr. Lord: Well, my final question sums it up. Can the minister tell us: is his department taking poaching and wildlife conservation issues seriously in this province?

Mr. Cardinal: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. That is a top priority. But one thing I want to say. Poaching is mentioned a lot of times in a negative way. I would say that 99.9 percent of Albertans are honest and will never poach, so we are dealing with a small, small percentage of the population in Alberta. In the past six years, in fact, there

have been approximately just a bit over a thousand people charged and fines of over \$1.1 million. So the area is working very well.

We do have, though, another challenge, Mr. Speaker. That's the number of wild animals that we have on our roadways in our forests and in our towns. Last year alone we had over 6,000 accidents between motor vehicles and animals out in the wild, so we do have challenges.

The Deputy Speaker: Before we proceed to the next item of business, I wonder if we might have unanimous consent to revert briefly to Introduction of Guests.

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today it's a great honour for me to introduce to you two wonderful ladies. The first one will be recognized tonight as a long-service employee with the government of Alberta at a special recognition. She has 35 years' service. She started with the government on July 15, 1968. She's had a variety of duties from finance and central personnel to training and staff development. At one time she worked for the minister of health, the Hon. J. Donovan Ross, moved into Premier's correspondence, and has worked with a number of MLAs. I've had the pleasure of working with this lady since I was elected in 1992. I would ask that Mrs. Dianne Wills please rise and receive the warm welcome.

I don't know if I'm allowed to do this, Mr. Speaker, but there's a lady up there who hasn't got an award for 32 years of putting up with me, but her family is very proud of a terrific mother, a great decorator, a super cook, a professional registered psychiatric nurse who drives 50 miles one way every day to help people with mental health needs: my wife, Mary.

head: **Members' Statements**

The Deputy Speaker: I have three on my list today. The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Crystal Methamphetamine

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, what would you do if you knew that your child was ingesting paint thinner, gas line antifreeze, hydrochloric acid, diet pills, Drano, ammonia, and battery acid? Well, our children in Alberta are ingesting these ingredients in the form of crystal meth, a dirty, filthy drug whose use is growing to epidemic proportions in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, we've been hearing about crystal meth in this Legislature since last spring. Crystal meth is a dirty drug. It uses dirty ingredients that are easy to obtain and cheap to buy. It's a cheap alternative to other drugs, including cocaine. A single hit of crystal meth costs about \$10 to \$20. It gives a more potent high than cocaine, lasts longer, and has a greater chance of hooking someone the first time they try it.

Should we be worried about crystal meth, Mr. Speaker? We should be very worried because crystal meth is a potent chemical cocktail brewed by amateur chemists in underground labs, that are cropping up with alarming frequency in rural and urban communities all over Alberta. You can find the recipes right on the Internet. Crystal meth has shown up in very serious quantities in Edmonton,

Edson, Drayton Valley, Leduc, Bonnyville, Hinton, Evansburg, Camrose, and Fort McMurray. I know that Red Deer and other central Alberta communities have not escaped this curse.

I commend the Solicitor General of Alberta for taking immediate action and learning about the problem in the United States because our children are the next targets. Every community needs to be aware of this problem. I also commend the members of the Battle River drug response task force for developing and producing a guide called Responding to Youth Involved with Drugs. I encourage all school districts to send for a copy of this guide and to start informing our students about the dangers of crystal meth.

When I asked an honours student why she would take the first hit, she said because she didn't know what it would do to her, and if she had known, she wouldn't have touched it. This honours student from a middle-class home was able to fight her addiction and go back to school. She's helping to spread the message to other students.

I encourage everyone in this Assembly to make it their business to inform their school officials of the severity of crystal meth use. This can't wait. We need to do something now to prevent the next student from becoming addicted to this dangerous, dirty drug.

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

Official Opposition Health Care Policy

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of all the issues we debate in this House, none is more important than the health and well-being of Albertans. That is why the Alberta Liberal opposition, after consulting with health care professionals, academics, stakeholders, and hundreds of Albertans, is presenting a new vision for health care in Alberta, a vision based on bold innovation and strong, steady management.

Our policy contains 24 detailed policy positions aimed at strengthening our public health care system and keeping Albertans healthy. Some of our most innovative ideas include requiring all major government policies to undergo a health impact assessment to gauge their potential effects on Albertans' health and a community wellness fund aimed not only at supporting public health initiatives but through FCSS building stronger communities from the grass roots up. As well, the provincewide community health centre model we are proposing will improve Albertans' access to health services and give communities a direct say in primary care reform.

We also stick to long-held Liberal commitments: a commitment to a publicly administered and publicly delivered health care system, a commitment to eliminate health care premiums, a commitment to elect regional health authority boards, a commitment to long-term, stable funding for health care.

2:40

Since its release our health policy has received a great deal of praise and recognition, but this doesn't mean our work is done. We're going to continue to add to, refine, and review it. I invite all members of this Assembly and all Albertans to contact our office for a copy of our policy and to provide comments. Together we can make medicare better.

Thank you.

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

Automobile Insurance Reform

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Albertans have been fed up with skyrocketing automobile insurance premiums

for years, yet this government only chose to act when it saw elections in other provinces being decided by this important issue. What was this government's response? To propose a series of patches. Just like a car on a gravel road with a patch on a bald tire, Albertans can't get very far on a premium freeze after insurance rates have increased by over 57 percent. The government is also floating a number of other quick fixes that won't solve the root of the problem.

The Official Opposition, however, began looking for a solution to the crisis in automobile insurance a year ago. Our extensive research showed that Alberta's problems will only be solved by moving to a public system of insurance. Our alternative plan is called People before Profits, which isn't just a catchy title but a philosophy on how a mandatory financial product like auto insurance should be provided.

Our made-in-Alberta plan for auto insurance builds on some of the principles that have been successful for the Insurance Corporation of British Columbia, a public tort system of insurance. Our alternative plan would lower premiums for good drivers regardless of age or sex, guarantee basic coverage to all legal drivers, put an end to the excessive insurance industry profits that have picked drivers' pockets, reduce the medical, legal, and administrative costs of providing insurance. Our plan will not discriminate against Edmonton motorists. As well, it will promote and enforce measures to keep all Albertans on the road safe. Our alternative plan would not place unfair caps on necessary medical and rehabilitative services for Albertans injured in motor vehicle accidents.

It's about fairness and finding a real solution to a problem that's affecting virtually every Alberta household. If this government and the citizens of this province would like to learn more about this alternative plan, please go to liberalopposition.com.

Thank you.

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

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

Mr. Hutton: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund I'd like to table the report of the standing committee for 2002-2003, and while I do that, I'd like to thank the committee clerk, Karen Sawchuk, and the *Hansard* staff for the fine work that they've done this year. Also, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the Minister of Revenue and his officials for the great assistance they provided this past year as well as my committee on both sides of the House for their contribution as it relates to a fund that enhances life for all Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: **Notices of Motions**

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise pursuant to Standing Order 34(2)(a) to give notice that on Monday I will move that written questions appearing on the Order Paper do stand and retain their places with the exception of Written Question 15.

I'm also giving notice that on Monday I will move that motions for returns appearing on the Order Paper do stand and retain their places.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

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

Ms Kryczka: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta, I'm very pleased to table five copies of the annual report for the council for the fiscal year ended March 31, 2003. I would also add that each member of this Assembly received a copy of the report earlier in the fall.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As minister responsible for sport in the province of Alberta it is my great pleasure to table the appropriate copies regarding a letter to Mr. Patrick LaForge, president and CEO of the Edmonton Oilers Hockey Club, congratulating them on this first ever reunion of National Hockey League players on outdoor ice and for the tremendous leadership they have shown in inaugurating this event in our city.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Smith: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table six copies of responses to questions asked before us at Committee of Supply on May 6. I think we answered some 150 questions verbally. These are the remaining few.

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I've got two documents to table today in the appropriate number of copies. The first one is a letter from an Edmonton parent with children in the Edmonton public school board, Erica Bullwinkle, dated November 20, 2003, addressed to the Minister of Learning. She, having talked to the school board, writes to the minister that she considered the minister's recent funding announcement to be inadequate as it will enable the Edmonton public schools to hire back only 36 teachers.

The second document, Mr. Speaker, is a letter written by Mayor Bill Smith on behalf of the council to the Minister of Learning expressing the council's concerns with respect to Bill 43, including the following motion, which says that

the Mayor's letter to the Minister of Learning include the City of Edmonton's concern . . . the effect that uncontrolled increase in post secondary tuition will have on attracting and retaining high quality students to the City of Edmonton.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Carlson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I have four tablings. They are from Anne Rieger, Charlotte Davis, Keith Siemens, and Kelly Thorburn, and they are all copies of letters that were originally sent to the Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky. They're all concerning their disappointment over his response to their letters regarding the negotiations between the Provincial Health Authorities of Alberta and the United Nurses of Alberta.

Thank you.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, I rise to table the requisite number of copies of an emergent resolution relating to deregulation of utilities from the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties, which says in part:

Whereas Alberta's farmers, businesses, industry, residents and not-for-profit groups have faced hardships through higher annual energy costs, inconsistent provincial rebate programs, unfair and

inefficient billing procedures and uncertainty in market supplies and contracts;

Therefore be it resolved that the AAMD & C request that the Government of Alberta abandon and reverse the process of deregulation of utilities.

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

Dr. Massey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I'd table the required number of copies of letters addressed to the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake from nurses who are distressed over what is being asked of them in the current contract negotiations and the tactics that are being used by the employer in those negotiations. The letters are from Diane Antoniuk, Frances Galambos, Linda Chislett, Marie Cardinal, Edith Monette, Linda Lynes-Franklin, Bonita Kalinsky.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Hutton: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter from a hardworking, well-meaning teacher and constituent, Mary Dunnigan, with her kudos, comments, and areas of concern regarding the Learning Commission report.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table an additional selection of letters that were written by young voters at a Get Political party that I hosted on November 8. The first letter is from Colleen M.T. Sharpe, who is writing about her \$30,000 student debt; a second letter from Don Stuike, who's writing about student debt and higher education becoming a commodity for the rich; a letter from Justin Lachance and Lyndsie Plowman commenting that Bill 43 is crippling student organizations "with underhanded and questionable legislation"; a letter from Laura Winton, who's outlining her concerns with the current tuition, eliminating the tuition cap, and the higher cost of living for students; and, finally, a letter from Michelle Kelly with grave concerns over Bill 43, accessibility, and student tuition.

Thank you very much.

2:50

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings this afternoon. The first is a document, Auto Insurance Review, dated October 15, 2003, put together by Alberta Finance, and in here it clearly indicates discrimination against Edmonton motorists with this insurance proposal.

The second group of tablings that I have this afternoon are letters that have been written to the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills and copied to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview among others. These letters are from Louise Dumaine, Jodi Gammage, Carol Lyne Martens, and Marlene Wiebe. They are expressing concern over negotiations between the Provincial Health Authorities and the registered nurses, especially concerning patient safety.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two sets of tablings. The first is the appropriate number of copies of our Liberal vision for the health of Albertans, our health care policy, which I'm very proud of.

The second is a set of letters written to me by a number of nurses in my constituency expressing concern over the state of negotiations between health authorities and the nurses raising questions about patient safety and so on. Each one is a handwritten personal letter. They are from Karen Wolgemuth, Carmen Vervoorst, Anita Ashmore, Dorothy Barclay, Darlene Heald, Heidi Lawton,* Angie Toner,* Nola Trynchy, Don Cytoko, Kaye Schultz, Joyce Hvingelby, Colleen Trimble, and Judy Koufogiannakis.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, I'm very pleased to table five copies of a brochure produced by the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. It's the Page Biographies, Third Session, fall sitting, 25th Legislature.

Thank you.

head: **Projected Government Business**

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Carlson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At this time I would ask the government to share with us the projected government business for next week.

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

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd be happy to do that. On Monday afternoon we'll be dealing with private members' business, written questions and motions for returns, followed by public bills and orders other than government bills and orders. In the evening from 8 to 9 we will deal with motions other than government motions, and at 9 we hope to deal with second reading of Bill 47, Tobacco Tax Amendment Act, 2003, and Bill 51, the Natural Resources Conservation Board Amendment Act, 2003. If we need to, we would also deal with third reading of Bill 6, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2003; Bill 36, the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Amendment Act, 2003; and Bill 37, the Climate Change and Emissions Management Act. Should time permit, we would go to Committee of the Whole on bills 47 and 51 as well as Bill 43, the Post-secondary Learning Act.

On Tuesday afternoon under Government Bills and Orders we hope to proceed with second reading of Bill 50, the Wildlife Amendment Act, 2003, and Bill 51 as well as Bill 44, the Personal Information Protection Act, and Bill 53, the Insurance Amendment Act, 2003 (No. 2), and otherwise as per the Order Paper. On Tuesday evening under Government Bills and Orders we hope to be in Committee of the Whole on Bill 45, the Family Law Act, as well as bills 44 and 43 and thereafter second reading of Bill 53, and otherwise as per the Order Paper.

On Wednesday afternoon under Government Bills and Orders, messages and supplementary supply, we intend to bring forward a government motion for a supply motion followed by second reading of Bill 48, the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Science and Engineering Research Amendment Act, 2003, as well as Bill 53, the Insurance Amendment Act, 2003 (No. 2), and Committee of the Whole for Bill 38, and otherwise as per the Order Paper. On Wednesday evening under Government Bills and Orders we hope to be at second reading with Bill 49, Public Lands Amendment Act, 2003, and Bill 53, and thereafter we would go to Committee of Supply – it would be supplementary supply day 1 of one – followed

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

by a reversion to Introduction of Bills for the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act at first reading, followed by second reading of Bill 53 and Committee of the Whole for Bill 38 and Bill 53.

On Thursday afternoon under Government Bills and Orders we hope to consider second reading of the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act along with Bill 52, the Health Professions Amendment Act, 2003, and Bill 46, the Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2003; thereafter, time permitting and so on, third reading of Bill 36, the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Amendment Act, 2003, and Bill 37, the Climate Change and Emissions Management Act; and, again time permitting, second reading and perhaps Committee of the Whole on Bill 53.

That is the projected government business for next week.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Government Motions**

2010 Vancouver/Whistler Olympic Games

24. Mr. Zwozdesky moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly show its support to the province of British Columbia in their efforts to bring awareness to all Canadians of the benefits of the 2010 Vancouver/Whistler Olympic Games to our athletes and young aspiring athletes as well as the benefits to maximize tourism and economic benefits relating to these games.

Mr. Zwozdesky: I might add, Mr. Speaker, that Albertans do share in the excitement as the Winter Olympics return to Canada in 2010, and I'm so very pleased that there will be opportunities for Alberta and British Columbia to collaborate on initiatives such as tourism and other developmental initiatives associated with these games.

The 2010 Olympics will give Alberta's athletes a true chance to shine, and we do have the opportunity to work with British Columbia on high performance athlete development. These games will also give young athletes a chance to watch their heroes up close and to see what it takes to become a top-calibre athlete.

As minister responsible for sport I'm obviously very excited by this, and I'm also excited as the minister responsible for the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities because Alberta athletes with disabilities will also have a chance to participate in the Paralympics, which will be held in Vancouver/Whistler immediately following the Olympics. These athletes will compete in eight Paralympic sports and will have the opportunity to showcase their skills and talents to the world.

These Olympics and Paralympics participants are tremendous role models for aspiring athletes as well as for all Albertans in demonstrating the many positive outcomes of a rich and active lifestyle. Alberta and B.C. should work together in an effort to link educational and physical activities to the principles of the games, which, overall, do support healthy living and learning initiatives.

There are countless other opportunities, Mr. Speaker, that come with the Olympics, including increased tourism. From our vibrant city centres to our natural scenic beauty Alberta has so much to offer the estimated 5,000 athletes and officials, over 10,000 media members, more than 14,000 volunteers, and about 2.3 million attendees who will be visiting western Canada. Alberta and B.C. have already taken a very big step forward when both provinces signed the joint memorandum of understanding on tourism initiatives on October 8 of this year and agreed to pursue the development of an Olympics corridor between Calgary and Whistler with the goal of bringing Olympics-related tourists to more areas of both our provinces.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, as Alberta learned through the 1988 Calgary Olympics and through the 2001 World Championships in Athletics in Edmonton, the spirit and the benefits of these major games do live on through legacies left behind. Those legacies include such things as facilities, community organizations, strengthened volunteerism, and the very long-lasting benefits of promoting active living and lifestyles.

Thank you very much for your anticipated support.

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

Ms Carlson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We in the Official Opposition support this motion, stating that the Legislative Assembly show its support to the province of British Columbia in their efforts to bring awareness to all Canadians of the benefits of the 2010 Vancouver/Whistler Olympic Games to our athletes and young aspiring athletes.

There is no doubt that this is going to have a huge economic impact in western Canada. Just the number of game tickets is going to be huge. It's estimated at 1.8 million tickets available. The GDP impact of the event will be well over \$2 billion. The estimated total GDP impact will be well over \$3 billion. We will see 55,000 direct person-years of employment being created as a result of these games and substantial taxes collected at the federal, provincial, and local tax levels, which will be a huge economic stimulus for the regions.

3:00

Also, there is going to be a direct benefit to Edmonton as a result of these games, Mr. Speaker. Alberta has a complete benefit from the Olympic Games as the Institute for Olympic Education is located here in Edmonton at the University of Alberta. It is located in the Department of Elementary Education in the Faculty of Education. The Vancouver LegaciesNow 2010 committee chose the Institute for Olympic Education at the U of A to help develop its curriculum for its various web tools, which will be a large part of the educational component. So what we see is a real integration of economic impact, educational impact in a manner to profile our country from a tourism perspective, from employment, and from our outstanding athletes and those outstanding athletes of other countries.

So it is our pleasure to support this particular motion and wish the province of B.C. every success in 2010.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister to conclude?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Just to call the question, please.

[Government Motion 24 carried]

head: **Government Bills and Orders**

head: **Second Reading**

Bill 49

Public Lands Amendment Act, 2003

Mr. Ducharme: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to move second reading of the Public Lands Amendment Act, 2003.

Mr. Speaker, the intent of this bill is to strengthen and clarify the government's role as the land manager of public lands. This is a huge role for government, to oversee 100 million acres of public lands throughout our province. We take this role very seriously. The changes being introduced today in this piece of legislation will allow our government to deal swiftly and effectively with instances of noncompliance on public lands and respond to increased demand within the agricultural industry to allow some bison grazing on public land.

Basically, the first set of amendments deals with unauthorized use of closed roads or trailways on public lands. Without going into specifics on all the amendments, I will highlight a number of them which will strengthen the existing act.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

First of all, in order to avoid confusion, we need to have it clearly stated in legislation that it is unlawful for people to travel on a closed road or to place barriers that impede lawful use of a road. Government can require the placement of signs saying that the road is closed, but if people refuse to obey these signs, we need to be able to deal with this effectively and swiftly.

We also need to clarify a police officer's authority to remove a person if they refuse to leave a closed-off area. Currently there is a gray area in dealing with who is responsible to deal with unlawful acts of accessing a closed area on public lands. Since it will be clearly stated in legislation that it is illegal to do so, we can then quite simply take it to the next level and have a police officer deal with the situation. Now, this is not to say that we won't be applying some law of reason to this situation. Much of the time we will hopefully be able to reason with the individual and won't need to call in the police. However, if things do need to go to the next level, we now have the legislation to enable us to do that.

Another change to the legislation deals with clearly outlining who is the land manager for this public land, which of course is the government of Alberta. This is important to remember because the next amendment explains that it is illegal for an individual to demand payment, money, or other goods in exchange for access to public lands which they are already entitled to enter. Essentially, as an Albertan you can't demand money from another individual for them to access public land, especially when the government is the land manager.

The last area in relation to access on public lands deals with the government's ability to take action against those individuals who illegally travel on a closed road. Explaining what currently goes on in trying to deal with this situation may shed some light on why this amendment needs to be put in place. Currently when people travel on a closed road or illegally place a barricade on public land, our only recourse is through a ministerial order. As many of you can understand, this can be a very long and arduous process. We need amendments in this legislation to streamline the process so that we can safely and legally control access on public land.

It's important to note that we are always improving the way we manage our public lands. As Alberta's population increases and more users wish to access public lands, we need to continue to find innovative ways to balance the needs of Albertans.

The other amendments that are in this bill will accommodate bison grazing. The bison industry has been one of the fastest growing agricultural industries in Alberta. In fact, estimates indicate that approximately \$15 million was generated from the sale of bison meat last year. These new amendments will allow for some bison grazing on public lands, agricultural dispositions under certain conditions. It's important to note that we have worked very closely with the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development on these amendments. This change is being proposed after serious review.

A multistakeholder committee which had representatives from the Alberta Bison Association, the Alberta Beef Producers, the Federation of Alberta Naturalists, the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties, the Alberta chapter of the Wildlife Society, the Peace Country Bison Association, the Alberta Grazing Leaseholders Association, and the Alberta Fish and Game Association was consulted. The committee was very concerned about disease transmission from wild to farmed bison.

Sustainable Resource Development has worked with the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development to develop disease-free testing, tracking, and marking requirements for bison grazing on public land. These requirements and the establishment of a high-risk area, which is north of Manning, will greatly reduce the risk of certain diseases spreading from wild bison herds to farmed bison. There will not be any bison allowed to graze on public land in the high-risk area.

Now, this is only the first step in allowing bison to graze on certain lands. Changes to the dispositions and fee regulations will also be required. Once the legislative changes are proclaimed, government will begin to review applications for bison grazing using criteria developed from the stakeholder committee recommendations.

So, in closing, Mr. Speaker, these are the changes being proposed to the Public Lands Act that will enable government to better manage this resource. Thank you.

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

Ms Carlson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to have an opportunity to speak to Bill 49, Public Lands Amendment Act, 2003. The sponsor of this bill, the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, called me some time ago, actually, to arrange a meeting to be briefed on this particular bill, and we managed to do that this week. He and a member of the minister's department and someone I believe from the Public Affairs Bureau sat down with me and went over two aspects of this bill, and I thought: well, I don't know what the big briefing was about because it seems to be pretty innocuous as we go through it.

What they talked to me about during that meeting was the part of the bill that talks about regulating the use and misuse of roads on public lands, and we've long talked about that as an outstanding issue that needed to be resolved. I support the piece of the legislation that deals with that. What that means is that when you have public lands and they've been closed for some reason and people still use that road, going against the posted signs and the barriers that might be across the road, then there should be some penalties associated with that. We support that.

Often the roads are closed because of environmental degradation reasons or because of impact on wildlife or other associated reasons, and they are closed for very good reasons. For people caught trespassing in those particular circumstances, I and also all of the consumer groups I've dealt with and environmental groups and municipalities believe that penalties should be higher and that there should be some enforcement. So that part of the bill I was very happy with.

The second part of the bill they talked about was the grazing of bison on public lands. While some people have an issue with this, particularly to do with disease control, I don't and neither have the people I have talked to. Bison grazing on public lands is a traditional use of those lands and is really reverting to a natural-state use and a way to maintain in most cases the ecological integrity of the land in accordance with century-old traditions. So I certainly didn't have a problem with that, and that was the end of our little briefing session.

3:10

I get back to the office and take a look at the bill and start to go through it and find out that there's a whole other piece of this particular legislation that didn't happen to get discussed in our briefing time which I have some really grave concerns about, Mr. Speaker. That's the part that allows peace officers, police officers to direct others not necessarily associated with law enforcement to

remove or seize property barricading an entry point to Crown lands. This deals with a section, primarily section 54, in this particular bill.

Now, we see this as a targeted example of this government trying to resolve the issue that we saw last year and which has developed over the course of a couple of years where some aboriginal communities have blocked access by oil exploration companies on Crown land. This was a big deal that was talked about last spring, and the government brought forward requests for funds to try to resolve this particular problem in last year's budget that was debated.

At that point, we expected the government to take a leadership role in developing a consultation process that would bring both parties to the table and resolve the outstanding issues through some form of negotiation. We also expected the federal government to be brought to the table in terms of discussing some of these issues because while they don't have jurisdiction over public lands per se in Alberta, they do have jurisdiction over a lot of the outstanding issues that I believe were being discussed at that time.

So it came as quite a surprise to us to see that the outcome of those dollars being spent and the outcome of what we thought were going to be positions of negotiation was this bill, which certainly at first glance looks like we could see a huge escalation of the potential for confrontation on those particular public lands. I haven't heard any reasonable explanation for why the government at this particular point in time thinks they need to give more power to the police in those regions and in fact what seems to be excessive power, enabling police officers to designate other people to assist them in bringing down barricades.

When we take a look at the past history in this country and we take a look at the situations of confrontation between aboriginal groups and land users, be they business or recreational users, we see that there have been some situations that have gotten completely out of control. We certainly do not want to see an Oka situation develop in the oil fields here in Alberta, and it seems like that's where this particular piece of legislation could land us.

Yes, there is conflict between oil field contractors and First Nations in Alberta's north, but we want to see that conflict resolved in a nonconfrontational manner, and we believe that that is certainly possible. We do not believe that those negotiations or this government are in a situation at this particular point in time where they are forced into bringing in legislation that empowers police to take more aggressive action. We certainly have very grave concerns about what this bill does in terms of empowering police to remove blockades that obstruct access to land.

We've seen in the past that some northern Alberta First Nation bands have used blockades to block nonaboriginal contractors when working in the oil industry, and some bands have claimed that their treaty rights grant them the rights of first refusal on contract work or a right to a cut of oil industry profits. But blockades and the way they are outlined to be handled in this particular bill we believe will only increase tension between First Nations and other communities, and that's not a situation that we want to see happen.

I need some answers to some questions. Why bring in this bill at this particular time? Where are the negotiations on resolving those issues? What about all the discussion we had in the spring? What were the outcomes of those? What are the contractors saying now? I don't think anybody wants people traveling in the northern part of our communities fearful that they're going to be facing confrontational kinds of situations. Everybody loses in that situation, Mr. Speaker, particularly the directly affected parties: the First Nations, the contractors, the police officers who are going to have to police this situation, and any people from the community who are going to be enlisted in this process.

That means a loss of negotiating ability between all parties involved. It means a huge loss of revenue for those people who would like to do business. I believe that it creates conflict and makes it very much more difficult to negotiate any of the land claim settlements that are currently at stake. It means that we have millions of dollars of oil revenue at issue here. So we could see where the situation in Alberta has even higher stakes at risk than those in Oka, and we do not want to see that kind of situation develop here.

We want to know what the negotiations were with the northern oil field conflict and the federal government. I heard this afternoon that the federal government said that because they're provincial Crown lands, they don't want to get involved, but I don't believe that's good enough. I believe this is a situation where both levels of government and the directly affected parties need to sit down and negotiate a settlement. This government allocated \$6 million in the 2003 budget. If this is the only outcome that we see as a result of that, then that was money very poorly spent, Mr. Speaker. We expect that that money would have been spent on consultation that actually led to a solution, not to legislation coming forward that can increase the ability for conflict.

In principle, if that's the way this bill stands, Mr. Speaker, I am certainly not very pleased with it, and I will not be supporting it at this stage. I do expect some detailed discussion and negotiation of this particular bill when we get to committee, and I expect some answers to those questions from the sponsor of this bill. So I hope he takes them under serious advisement and we get some more detail on where this bill is going, what the intent of it was, and how otherwise those negotiations are going in the north.

Thank you.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's with interest that one gets to participate in the debate this afternoon on Bill 49, the Public Lands Amendment Act. Certainly, the changes that were originally expressed by the government and by the sponsor of this bill are now reasons for a second look at these proposed changes.

You know, certainly when you think that the changes are being proposed to strengthen existing legislation with regard to regulating the use and misuse of roads and public lands – that is, to prevent people from traveling or being on a closed licence-of-occupation road, the idea to permit the grazing of bison on public land, and to allow peace officers to direct others not necessarily associated with law enforcement to remove or seize property barricading an entry point to Crown lands. Well, the first two issues are fair enough, but I think that the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie is absolutely right. We could live with that; we could accept that.

Whenever we are going to discuss allowing peace officers to direct others not necessarily associated with law enforcement – I hope that's not a vigilante group, which I'm sure it isn't – to remove or seize property barricading an entry point to Crown lands, what specifically is the intention of this? We had quite a discussion regarding this, and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glegarry and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie certainly had some very thoughtful suggestions and observations in regard to this land issue. There have been incidents in the past, particularly in the northern part of the province. The membership of the Northern Oilfield Contractors Association is scattered and located throughout northern Alberta. They had some issues around access. Even the Slave Lake Chamber of Commerce expressed concern about the issue of land access.

3:20

Now, I'm also of the view that this bill as it's presented to us could increase tension or the potential of conflict between oil field contractors and the First Nations of Alberta's north, and I don't think we need to be increasing the potential for conflict or increasing the potential for tension between those parties. It has been described as the Alberta government's bill that could lead to an Oka in the oil fields. We all know and understand and appreciate just exactly how beneficial oil field activity is to the economic well-being of this province. We don't need to have confrontation. I think we should have consultation and we should have negotiation, and that is particularly expressed very well in the document that was tabled in this Legislative Assembly this past February, I believe, by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenarry.

The whole idea in this legislation of empowering police to remove blockades that obstruct access to land – well, we all know that some northern Alberta First Nations bands have used blockades to block nonaboriginal contractors from working in the oil industry. Some bands have claimed that their treaty rights grant them the right of first refusal on contract work or a right to a portion of all oil industry profits. Now, surely we can have some consultation and discussion. I would be interested to know – and perhaps we'll find out in committee if not at second reading – if there has been a process of consultation in regard to the drafting of this Bill 49 and if there has been consultation just exactly what the affected parties had to say to the government in regard to this matter.

Now, when we talk about recommendations and solutions, instead of talking about forming a posse, we should form a group that will discuss the issues and perhaps come to an understanding. Instead of passing this legislation at this time, I think we would be better off taking some of the suggestions from this report of the Northern Oilfield Contractors Association.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Some of the things that they have suggested, in conclusion, Mr. Speaker, are the formation of community advisory groups in small numbers that are manageable and that the government of Alberta through an independent facilitator could lead discussions but that solutions are to come from the stakeholders. Now, I don't believe this item in Bill 49 is a solution. Also, "recognize that the end result is a fair, open, and (if desired) competitive business market in Alberta's resource sector throughout all Crown Land." The contractors' association also wants to point out, "Recognize that racism and discrimination are unacceptable elements throughout a free Canadian Society." Their association "is committed to eliminating all factors which foster discrimination both in the workplace and our community environment."

To think that we would be willing to go ahead with this sort of legislation at this time is just plain wrong, and I think there should be, as other people have said, a greater focus on education and training. I would urge all members of this Assembly to say no, in fact say no to the entire Bill 49 because of what could happen in the future. I don't think it has been thought out – and others may disagree and rightfully so – but there have been solutions and recommendations presented in regard to these matters that do not require that we increase armed presence where there are disputes, because the consequences could be catastrophic.

As this day progresses, we should recognize, each and every one of us, just what a peaceful and democratic country we live in. There is almost total chaos, almost total anarchy in the country of Turkey as we speak, and it is unfortunate. It is unfortunate that we cannot

learn from the lessons of others. Let's have a process of negotiation and consultation, not enhance some sort of idea that we can have confrontation.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Any comments or questions?

Okay. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll keep my comments fairly brief as I need to think this one through and mull it over. I see it as a genuinely tough issue, a real dilemma here underlying the intent or motivation of this bill, or at least I'm assuming so.

The bill clearly does clarify the controls of the provincial government and of peace officers and police over roads and access to Crown land, to public lands. I think there's something to be said for making rules clear, and I can see also that there are times when these provisions perhaps are necessary. There are some obvious things here, I think. Making it illegal to demand payment for access to public lands: that kind of thing is certainly worthy.

My unease with the bill comes from its sense, when I read it, of a kind of aggressive stance, which seems to probably increase, if not increase then certainly clarify very much, the capacity of police and their deputies and so on to remove barriers on roads, to be armed, and so on. Again, there are times when that's undoubtedly legitimate. My concern is that this could be seen as an inflammatory bill, and that's what I'm weighing in my mind.

Are we setting the stage here for unnecessary and violent confrontation, which could in fact be more destructive than anyone intends? I mean, the people of Quebec are still struggling with the Oka showdown. I think it's eight years ago or something. There have been similar ones in B.C. and elsewhere. I think the people of Alberta and, frankly, the government of Alberta and the police of Alberta deserve credit that while there have been tensions over land access in northern Alberta, so far they have not come to a violent head. I think that if they were, we might find the repercussions and downfalls of that to be so severe that they weren't worth a confrontation and that a slow, patient approach would have been better.

3:30

I'm going to listen carefully to the debate. I look forward to many, many MLAs participating in this. I'll be certainly reading as widely on it as I can and consulting with others on it. I find that this bill, to me, presents a series of issues that I am not yet resolved on but I am concerned about.

So with those comments for now, Mr. Speaker, I'll take my seat and look forward to further debate. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any comments or questions?

The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake to close debate.

Mr. Ducharme: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will certainly undertake to provide responses to all the questions that were brought forward during second reading and provide that at the next stage of the bill. So I'd now ask for the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for second reading carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:32 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Ady	Hlady	McClellan
Amery	Horner	McFarland
Boutilier	Hutton	Nelson
Cao	Jacobs	Oberg
Cardinal	Knight	Pham
Coutts	Kryczka	Smith
Ducharme	Lord	Snelgrove
Dunford	Lougheed	Stevens
Fritz	Lund	VanderBurg
Gordon	Magnus	Woloshyn
Graham	Mar	Yankowsky
Griffiths	Marz	Zwozdesky
Haley	Maskell	

Against the motion:

Carlson	Mason	Taft
MacDonald		

Totals: For – 38 Against – 4

[Motion carried; Bill 49 read a second time]

Bill 51
Natural Resources Conservation Board
Amendment Act, 2003

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

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to move second reading of the Natural Resources Conservation Board Amendment Act, 2003.

I'm bringing this act forward on behalf of my colleague the hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Administrative changes are required to deal with the expanded role of the Natural Resources Conservation Board. Amendments are also needed to clearly separate the quasi-judicial function of the board from its administrative function. These changes will also clarify financial controls, membership of the board, and the unbiased nature of the appeals.

The purpose of the Natural Resources Conservation Board Amendment Act is to provide an impartial process to review projects that could affect Alberta's natural resources. The board reviews these kinds of projects to ensure that they are in Alberta's best interest. The board closely examines possible social, economic, and environmental impacts of these projects. Under this act the board may also give other responsibility under other acts such as the Agricultural Operation Practices Act. Those responsibilities may include running a regulatory system in addition to the board's quasi-judicial status.

This act also standardizes the term for board members to five years. The requirement for an address before the Legislature to remove a board member will also be repealed. Finally, to maintain consistency with standard government financial practices, the board's budget will fall under the Ministry of Sustainable Resource Development's budget.

In January 2002 the NRCB gained responsibility for regulating Alberta's confined feeding operations and for administering the Agricultural Operation Practices Act. Since then the NRCB has had two distinct functions: making important quasi-judicial decisions regarding applications under the NRCB Act and the Agricultural Operation Practices Act and administering the regulatory system for

the Agricultural Operation Practices Act and supporting and hearing the structure for the NRCB Act.

In the past year there has been some confusion around the board's new responsibilities. These issues reflect the board's initial role and the legislative framework created to accomplish its more limited objectives. The board's increased responsibilities have resulted in the need for greater clarity between its quasi-judicial and operational roles. Both the regulatory and the quasi-judicial functions are essential to the board's current role. Both need to be clear. The amendments clarify the board's role regarding these two separate and distinct functions.

Changes will also ensure that financial practices are similar to standard government procedures, reinforcing financial controls. Currently funds transferred to the board must first be approved by a vote in the Legislative Assembly. With the changes the board's budget will be included under SRD's budget. The board will report to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development for budget approval. Although the board will have a new financial reporting structure, it will not impact the board's quasi-judicial or operational roles or decision-making abilities. Consistent with current practice the minister will have no jurisdiction over these NRCB areas. Including the board's budget with SRD's budget will enhance accountability of both the board and of government.

These amendments will also standardize to five years the terms for which members are appointed. At the end of the term board members' performance will be reviewed. If a member seeks renewal, that review will be incorporated into any decisions surrounding potential membership renewal. Currently, an address before the Legislature is required to remove a board member. This is a time-consuming and costly process that prevents the minister from responding quickly to issues involving the board membership. Removing the requirement for the legislative address will give the government the necessary flexibility to resolve such matters. Other changes may include adjusting the number of board members to meet the board's changing responsibilities.

All of these amendments will permit the board to fill its quasi-judicial role in a fair and neutral fashion and still keep its administration businesslike and efficient. The changes will bring clarity to the role of the NRCB and enhance the accountability of government.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to move that we adjourn debate on Bill 51. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

3:50head: Government Bills and Orders
head: Third Reading

Bill 6
Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2003

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

Mr. Zwozdesky: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Thank you. On behalf of my colleague the Minister of Justice and Attorney General, I am pleased today to move third reading of Bill 6, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2003.

As all members of the House are aware, these acts are often used to consolidate and to bring forth minor changes to justice legislation. The bill currently before the House includes amendments to four justice acts, the first of which is the Judicature Act.

First, minor amendments to the Judicature Act will ensure that security staff can respond appropriately to security threats in

courthouses and other buildings that contain courtrooms and will clarify that the minister may appoint either individuals or an entire class of people as courthouse security officers. This change is part of Alberta Justice's and Alberta Solicitor General's commitment to work with judges and justices in all three levels of court to deal with courthouse security concerns while ensuring our courts remain open and accessible to all Albertans.

The second act affected here is the Alberta Young Offenders Act. As the members of this House are aware, the federal Youth Criminal Justice Act came into force on April 1, 2003, and replaced the former Young Offenders Act. Now, Alberta already has provincial legislation that sets out the procedures related to provincial offences committed by those under 18 years of age such as offences under the Traffic Safety Act and the Prevention of Youth Tobacco Use Act, for example. Bill 6 will amend that provincial legislation to mirror the changes made under the new Youth Criminal Justice Act. For instance, some terminology will be changed and the maximum fine for provincial offences will be increased from \$500 to \$1,000 to conform to the maximum set out in the Youth Criminal Justice Act. Finally, the current name of our act, the Young Offenders Act, will become the Youth Justice Act.

The third and fourth relevant acts here are the Petty Trespass Act and Trespass to Premises Act. I'll refer to the amendments to the final two bills, the Petty Trespass Act and the Trespass to Premises Act, together since the changes are related.

Mr. Speaker, many members of this House have heard concerns from rural constituents about trespassers on their land. Sometimes trespassers come onto the property with all-terrain vehicles, damaging the land or even posing a threat to children and livestock. Under current legislation a land or property owner must appear before a justice of the peace to lay a charge against an alleged trespasser. Albertans told us this was an unnecessarily onerous process and the available penalties were too small. As a result, these acts are being amended to allow peace officers to lay charges and the maximum fines are being increased to \$2,000 and to \$5,000 if it is the second or subsequent offence for the trespasser against the same property.

The amendments also provide that if the land in question is obviously private land as indicated by cultivation, fenced areas, the presence of livestock, and so on, then entry is prohibited unless the landowner gives his or her permission.

A further amendment to the Petty Trespass Act will also make it an offence to remove or deface no-trespassing signs. The maximum penalty for this will be \$2,000.

Thank you for this opportunity, Mr. Speaker, and I would encourage all members to carefully consider this bill and support it.

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

Ms Carlson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've seen some debate on this particular bill in the spring, and then it was held over during the course of the summer. Some amendments were brought forward that we had the opportunity to review and debate earlier this week. Generally speaking, we were in support of the amendments and the general direction of this bill. It was mainly a bill that dealt with small changes or definitional changes and from our perspective wasn't really controversial in any way. So we have in fact supported this bill at all readings and continue to support it at this particular time.

So with that, I'll take my seat and call for the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 6 read a third time]

Bill 36
Environmental Protection and Enhancement
Amendment Act, 2003

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

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to move third reading of Bill 36, the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Amendment Act, 2003, on behalf of my colleague the Minister of Environment.

In summary, Mr. Speaker, Bill 36 allows electronic reporting of environmental incidents and strengthens Alberta Environment's ability to adopt and enforce codes of practice. The bill also supports recent changes to the reclamation and remediation program for upstream oil and gas operations.

Thank you.

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

Ms Carlson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again, this is a bill that we saw in the spring, and it came back this fall. While it deals with four quite different objectives, it is fairly minor in nature as far as we can see at this particular time, and we haven't had over the course of the summer any huge number of people or organizations in opposition to any of the particular sections of this act.

Really, it does four different things here in the act. One is with regard to the electronic reporting. This is just bringing their legislation up to current standards. Many people fax or e-mail, and it makes it much easier for people or organizations who have to report to the department to do so as fast as they can. If they release a substance that can cause an adverse affect, the requirement is that they report to the director, so now they can do it by fax or by e-mail with this change. We support that because when there has been a problem, the department needs to know sooner rather than later, and it certainly is better than just being able to appear in person or send a written letter.

Then it talks about the codes of practice. We always have lots of controversy in this province about whether or not business should be done by regulation or whether a code of practice is acceptable. It has been the common practice of this government to often use codes of practice for different kinds of what would otherwise be regulations in terms of enforcement issues. So what we're seeing here is a little bit of cleaning up in this area. The standards are laid out, I think, a little more clearly, and so that's good news.

The third thing is that they're eliminating the 25-year limit to issuing environmental protection orders for sites that have been granted a reclamation certificate. This is the piece that has required the most amount of debate in this House. It isn't hugely controversial, although some organizations, some corporations don't like it because it means that their environmental liability can be extended. We have found through practice that that's a very good idea because, particularly with well site reclamation, sometimes it takes a very long time to see what the subsequent or resultant impact is on the land, and then the government is on the hook for the cleanup.

We have numerous situations like this throughout this province. The government has a substantial contingent liability in this regard. We asked the minister of environmental protection to tell us what that contingent liability would be before we voted on this bill, and he has been unable to do so, so far. Perhaps we'll have to resort to written questions to get that particular answer. It's too bad. It would have been nice if it had happened in this debate because the government is on the hook for a lot of dollars for cleanup. Wherever we can extend this responsibility to the corporations responsi-

ble, the better it is for all concerned, I think. So that's what happens here. The corporations need to be more vigilant in their reclamation activities, and it gives them time so that as standards are improved, corporations can bring those standards into practice on lands that they previously used. So that's a good thing.

4:00

The last little bit of this piece of legislation was some minor cleanup that we saw happening to wording and so on, not substantive in nature and things that we supported.

So with that, Mr. Speaker, I will conclude my remarks on this bill. We will be supporting it in third reading.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to indicate to the House that we continue to have mixed feelings about this bill, you could say. We are prepared to applaud the extension of liability for abandoned well sites to 25 years, and we think that's a positive step. If the government makes use of that in the future, I think that would be a potential benefit to the people of Alberta.

We do continue to have serious reservations about the use of self-regulation in this matter, and notwithstanding the use of reclamation specialists and paperwork being submitted to the government and so on or even the codes of practice for acceptable reclamation, it is problematic from our point of view that government inspectors would only do random audits of reclaimed well sites, access roads, and abandoned rights-of-way. That is a concern, Mr. Speaker, from our point of view. It depends very much on the resourcing of the department and the proportion that is put towards this problem. There's now a backlog of 40,000 uninspected sites in this province, and the department as it now stands can only do 1,700 per year. So, clearly, there should be an increase in the resources available to do this, and we are not sure that just passing off the lion's share of the responsibility to the oil and gas companies themselves is exactly what is required here.

So with that, Mr. Speaker, I will take my seat and indicate that we will not be supporting Bill 36 at this time. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader to close debate?

[Motion carried; Bill 36 read a third time]

Bill 37

Climate Change and Emissions Management Act

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

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of my colleague the Minister of Environment it's my pleasure to stand today and to move third reading of Bill 37, the Climate Change and Emissions Management Act.

In quick summary, Mr. Speaker, Bill 37 addresses specific greenhouse gas emissions in the context of our government's action plan on climate change. This bill would provide for sectoral agreements, emissions trading, programs, reporting, and funding of technological approaches to climate change.

Thank you.

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

Ms Carlson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a bill we don't like.

It's a silly bill. It's one that doesn't really address the real issues at hand. It's a grandstanding bill brought forward by this government to try and justify their positions, which is really too bad, because the bureaucracies of the various departments, being the Department of Energy and the Department of Environment, are making great progress and, I believe, do have the solutions for this province to meet all the Kyoto targets, but this government likes to position themselves on the time line of dinosaurs and has done so once again with this particular bill. We raised our concerns about it in the spring, over the course of this summer, and again in the fall. I was hoping that the government would take this bill and not bring it back, but that's not what they chose to do.

There aren't any sections here, really, that show any promise. My biggest concerns are with section 3, where they talk about the specified gas emission targets. It's really the key part of the bill, and it states that the greenhouse gas emission target "is a reduction by December 31, 2020 of specified gas emissions [related] to Gross Domestic Product to an amount that is equal to or less than 50% of 1990 [totals]." So if it was just a reduction by 50 percent, then it would be good, but it talks about the relationship of this to the GDP.

What this really means is that the Alberta plan would let emissions in Alberta increase but at a slower rate than business as usual. Well, that isn't acceptable. It isn't acceptable for this province, for this country, or for any other country as we try to address this particular issue. There are lots of ways that government can stimulate this reduction, and it's really not a smart idea for them to be promoting growth of GHGs, greenhouse gas emissions, as they are in this particular part.

We also see part of this section giving cabinet the ability to make regulations regarding interim emission targets and targets for specified gases and for different sectors of the economy. So there is no certainty that by doing this, they'll be able to meet any of the targets in their preamble. We completely don't support this.

The sectoral agreements that are talked about in section 4 are also an issue. Why are they proposing sectoral agreements? In spite of having asked this question a number of times, we haven't got any answers to this. A better solution for us would be . . .

Mr. MacDonald: A Liberal government.

Ms Carlson: Yeah. There you go. That would be a way better solution. I like that one a lot.

Mr. Magnus: I can't believe who said that.

Ms Carlson: I see it's seconded by one of the government members from Calgary, Mr. Speaker. Finally, they're starting to see the light on that side of the House. It's about time.

So what we really need the government to do is to provide a better framework, and that's what we've asked for all along for this and then consult with sectoral interests and then legislate what they deem to be appropriate. This is a top-down approach that doesn't work, and we just simply can't support it.

[Mr. Lougheed in the chair]

Section 5, where they talk about emission offsets, is also a problem. We asked some questions around this. Once again, Mr. Speaker, we didn't get any answers. No big surprise. The front bench doesn't have the answers. We really need to go to the staff, because they're the people who know what's going on here and should be moving this particular issue forward. Section 5 deals with

emission offsets, and this section gives cabinet the ability to make regulations respecting the offsets, the credits, and the sink rights.

The biggest problem is that the wording of this particular section does not force them to make any regulations respecting offsets, and we really need some direction on this in terms of what the government is going to be expecting of industry. We want a concrete plan that talks about how offsets and credits and a credit exchange might work. You know, there's already a market for these, and this government once again is four steps behind everybody else. It's a hollow section and doesn't give us any information.

The mandatory reporting section, which is section 6, is a problem. It indicates that anyone who releases or permits the release of greenhouse gases at levels in excess of the level dictated by the regulations must report that release according to the regulations. So my question there, Mr. Speaker, is: so what? They report it and then what happens? This government has an abysmal record when it comes to monitoring and enforcement. We need a concrete number for what the threshold will be. We need specific rules regarding the reporting. We need to know what the penalties will be. We need to know what the enforcement process is. Nothing here.

4:10

Section 7 talks about the associated programs, and what it talks about is that they may create programs. Well, we've seen by the kind of popular reaction that we had to bringing in a program for consumers to be able to retrofit their homes that this government is not going to do anything to help people in this province in terms of reducing their own personal greenhouse gas emissions or reducing their energy costs. So once again it's a very poor performance by a government who is completely out of touch with the concerns of average Albertans and the escalating costs that they face with the direction that this government takes. [interjection] Well, perhaps you'd like to stand up and get your comments on the record in terms of this particular bill. That would be more helpful than just chirping away from the other side.

Mr. MacDonald: Calgary-North Hill.

Ms Carlson: Yes. Calgary-North Hill needs to stand up, Mr. Speaker, and put his comments officially on the record rather than just chirping away from his seat.

Section 8 talks about the agreements regarding interjurisdictional co-operation. This is the issue of greatest contention for this province. What should be sent in the report cards that go home to consumers is: does not play well with others. [interjection] Well, it's true. My colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar likes that comment, and it's very true. This is a government who not only doesn't play well with others, won't play well with others, and we've seen a great deal of evidence this past week in the words and actions of the Premier and in their negotiations with other provinces and the federal government. So, you know, really they've got to get with the program one of these days and talk about how they're going to co-operate with other jurisdictions, because if they don't, it's going to impair Alberta's growth, Mr. Speaker, and that would be a shame because we have a great many opportunities in this province that this government is seeing go by the wayside.

Section 9 talks about property right: "A sink right is a property right." We haven't seen any of the rules come out about this or even any of the guidelines or any of the discussion. We still need to know: does this particular section indicate that the province can't claim credits for sinks that are privately owned, and what are the implications for the interjurisdictional issues that will be falling out of this? So, then, what's this government's position on carbon sinks

as a commodity? We know what the globe is saying, but what's this province saying?

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

My other major concern then – I'm reading my last major concern, which includes every section in this bill – is section 10, which talks about the climate change and emissions management fund. This section establishes that fund and suggests what it could be used for and talks about some of the financial management. Generally speaking, we've said that having a fund in place is a good idea, but we need to know what the specific activities of the fund will be. We need to know what the programs are going to be, how they'll be operated, what projects will be funded, how funding applications are made, and how decisions are made as to which projects they're going to fund. From everything we've heard from the front bench, a retrofit fund is not going to be a part of this. So who is going to gain the benefit, I guess, is a very good question.

Overall, I don't like the bill, never liked the bill, never got any good answers to it, and won't support it.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to vigorously oppose Bill 37, the so-called Climate Change and Emissions Management Act. Speaking to some of the broad perspectives contained in the bill, it's very, very difficult to fathom the chutzpah of the government in writing some of these things into this bill. For example, the very first clause of the bill under the preamble says, "Whereas the Government of Alberta has a deep and well established commitment to protect Alberta's environment." The sheer gall.

We could list a litany of dreadful happenings to our environment while this government has sat by not with benign neglect but perhaps with malign neglect: the despoliation of our northern forests, the spread of factory farms, the contamination of our underground water by underregulated drilling practices in this province, the failure to deal with the special areas that were promised at one point by this government. There is just no end to the damage that has happened to Alberta's environment under this government.

They go on, Mr. Speaker, in the whereases of the bill to say that we own our natural resources in Alberta on behalf of all Albertans. Well, that's true that Albertans own them. Whether or not they're being managed for the interests of Albertans as opposed to the oil companies is a very debatable point, and I'd be happy to debate that at any time in this Legislature.

It goes on to say with breathtaking lack of modesty that "Alberta is recognized around the world for leading-edge innovation in environmentally sustainable technologies" and that we recognize that "the management of emissions of carbon dioxide, methane and other specified gases will serve to protect Alberta's environment." Well, they may recognize that the management of these things will serve to protect Alberta's environment, but actually doing so in a meaningful way is something that has escaped the government, Mr. Speaker.

It says that it "will work co-operatively with other jurisdictions to harmonize efforts to reduce emissions of carbon dioxide, methane [and so on] without impairing economic growth." So as long as there's no impact on economic growth, they will co-operate. Perhaps they will co-operate around the world, Mr. Speaker, a little bit more than they will co-operate here at home in Canada.

You know, we have seen this government seize every opportunity to ride into battle against the federal government for both real and imagined wrongs. There are definitely some real wrongs that the

provincial government has a duty to stand up to on behalf of Albertans, but clearly one of the main thrusts of the government is to find every opportunity to pick a fight with the government in Ottawa. There are plenty of examples.

Now, why are they doing that, Mr. Speaker? Well, it's pretty clear that it is easier to campaign against Ottawa than it is to defend this government's sorry record on so many issues. They would rather talk about the Wheat Board than about electricity deregulation. They would rather talk about Senate reform than meaningful insurance reform. They would rather talk about health councils than they would like to talk about laying off a thousand teachers and then hiring them back.

So it's clearly a political strategy, Mr. Speaker. Rather than defend their own record and their own actions, they would pick a fight with Ottawa. I presume that they have polling data to indicate that this is a beneficial political strategy on their part, but I do believe that Albertans will want to hold this government accountable at election time for its own actions and policies and record as opposed to the federal government's policy and record, which is also a pretty poor one. I might just add that in.

You know, we move along in this bill, and it wants to provide certainty – well, that's fine – and it says that carbon dioxide and methane in the atmosphere are not toxic. Well, that's fine, but we come to the clause “specified gas emission target,” which is 3(1). I think it should be relettered to 3(1)(w), and that should be pronounced “dubya” because this is in fact the Bush formula for dealing with CO₂ emissions, and that is not to talk about it in terms of an absolute reduction in CO₂ emissions but in terms of a percentage of the gross domestic product.

4:20

By doing that, they permit a steady growth in the actual absolute output of CO₂ from this province. That's the approach of the government. As long as they can keep the economy growing, then they're going to continue to turn out more CO₂. Of course, turning out more CO₂ will only accelerate the changes that are produced by global warming, the climate change that the bill claims to be all about.

So we have a circular argument contained within the bill, Mr. Speaker. You start out saying that we have a commitment to the environment and that we recognize we have to manage these things. Then you insert a formula that allows the CO₂ emissions to continue to rise, and you come back to the same point that we're at now.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to indicate that the New Democrat opposition is strongly opposed to this bill, and I think we're the first out of the gate in respect to the importance of ratifying Kyoto. We do not believe that the ratification of Kyoto necessarily should harm the Alberta economy in any way. In fact, we believe that it provides clear opportunities for Alberta businesses to expand, and if we do want to actually become the leaders in environmental protection, then this is a real opportunity.

Of course, in very significant ways in the negotiations with the federal government, the federal government caved in to Alberta, and that's why the severe opposition to Kyoto more or less disappeared. This was introduced with great fanfare in our spring session as the pre-eminent piece of legislation that was going to be basically the flagship of legislation, yet it was allowed to just end and be reintroduced here in our fall session. That, I think, indicates that our analysis of the purpose of this bill is correct. That is to say that this bill was designed as a flag on a hill to rally the troops against Ottawa and to rally the troops against Kyoto.

When Alberta had achieved some of its goals on behalf of the oil and gas industry and when it became apparent that the federal

Liberal government had absolutely no intention of actually enforcing the Kyoto accord, then the provincial government backed off. All of a sudden the bill no longer had the priority that it initially seemed to have, and that is, in my view, directly related to the hypocrisy of the federal Liberal government on this issue. They want the thing ratified. They have no intention of really enacting it and following the goals and the guidelines that they say.

I have no reason to believe that under the new leader this is going to change. Perhaps an element of hypocrisy will be removed, but certainly the federal government will have no more interest in seriously meeting our Kyoto obligations than the Alberta government has, Mr. Speaker. I think, to the Alberta government's credit, it's at least a little more honest about where it stands.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, we are strongly opposed to the so-called Climate Change and Emissions Management Act, and we think that it is entirely in contradiction to the noble goals set forth in its own preamble, particularly that “the Government of Alberta has a deep and well established commitment to protect Alberta's environment for future generations.”

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 37 read a third time]

Bill 41

Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2003

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

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Revenue it's my pleasure to move third reading of Bill 41, the Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2003.

There has already been some very good debate on this bill over the past couple of days in fact, and I know that the Minister of Revenue has addressed the majority of the opposition's questions in Committee of the Whole last night. However, there do remain a few questions that the Minister of Revenue has committed to provide responses to, and I know he will be doing that.

I would also like to mention that we continue to hear on a daily basis the many benefits of living, working, and investing in Alberta, and Bill 41 continues this government's commitment to corporate and small business and acknowledges the positive economic effects recognized by businesses and governments throughout the country.

As such, I'm pleased to move this third reading of Bill 41 and to support the Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2003.

Thank you.

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

Ms Carlson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, on this particular bill there's been very little debate. All the debate that has occurred on the bill has been by opposition members with the exception of the people who have introduced the bills on the government side of the various readings. It's a good example of the commitment that the government has to being in this Legislature. We see this week once again: it's not even 4:30 this afternoon; we are finished with the business of the day early once again. Seventy-four government MLAs can't make a commitment to talk about the business that they bring before this House.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Learning.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In direct response to what the

hon. member just said, I have a bill before this Legislative Assembly that I would be more than happy to speak about, but through courtesy to the opposition we have asked not to speak about that until Monday.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, are you asking a question or making a comment?

Mr. MacDonald: No. I would like to participate in debate on Bill 41. He can go first.

Mr. Mason: Yeah. I'd love to respond to the hon. minister's comments, but I'm going to talk to the bill, Mr. Speaker. I just want to put on record once again the New Democrat opposition's opposition to this bill or to significant parts of the bill.

Mr. Speaker, the provincial government has, I think, acted in a difficult and irresponsible manner with respect to the province's finances. They should be managing the province's finances as if we didn't have all the oil and gas revenue. They have become very dependent on this depleting source of revenue and particularly royalties from natural gas, which provide the lion's share of the extra money that this provincial government has.

What they've done in taking advantage of that depleting source of revenue is they've offered a billion-dollar tax cut to corporations, and at the same time they continue to say that they're going to maintain a high level of funding for health care, education, and other important programs enjoyed by Albertans. Yet we saw just a year ago a sudden drop in the price of natural gas, which created a crisis in the government, Mr. Speaker. It created a financial crisis because the Provincial Treasurer was so afraid that she was going to go to jail if she ran a deficit, she immediately started to slash important programs. You know, there was a sudden reduction in funding for things like programs for aboriginal children at risk, and that was a devastating blow. It wasn't because the Minister of Children's Services or the government didn't actually believe in these programs, because I think they do. They're not very high priority, but they do believe in them and they wanted to provide those programs. But all of a sudden the natural gas prices fell, and we didn't have the revenue to sustain them, so they had to cancel some of these programs, and these kids were hurt by that.

4:30

The reason is that they don't pay enough attention to their basic tax base. They think that they can offer tax cuts and that they can offer different programs at the same time because they're going to finance a lot of it just out of natural gas royalty revenue and other royalty revenue. So, you know, they're on thin ice, Mr. Speaker, because these sources of revenue are temporary. The last report I saw showed that we had less than nine years of proven reserves of natural gas left in this province. So how are we going to do that and offer these big tax cuts to the corporations? This is the real problem that I have with what the government is doing, because I don't think they are being fiscally responsible. If they were, they would be putting the lion's share of that revenue aside and living within our means.

Mr. Speaker, can you imagine this government if it had to run the province of Saskatchewan? Can you imagine? Without the natural gas and the oil revenues that this province has, this government would be out on its ear within one election because they couldn't manage. They couldn't manage an economy that was half the size of this one. They couldn't manage without all of that extra oil and gas revenue. They couldn't manage. They couldn't live within their means because they're bad financial managers and they are so used

to having money. They're like a really rich kid that's never had to work, you know, never had to get out and actually earn a living. Their allowance is so big, so large that if they screw up, if they make a mistake, they can just say: "Here; this will take care of it. Here's \$2 billion for electricity rebates because, you know, we kind of screwed that up. Oh, here's \$2 billion more for natural gas rebates because we screwed that up. Oh, we laid off a thousand teachers? Well, here's a few million dollars. We'll fix that." You know, this is not responsible government.

So I think, quite frankly, that we ought not to cut out a billion dollars of our tax revenue. Quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, that's what it comes down to. We can support the small business tax reduction. We can support reductions that have been made in the personal income tax and the increase in the personal exemption, but we have to draw the line at a billion dollars in corporate tax cuts because there's no evidence whatsoever that these are going to produce any increased activity in this province. I know that's the theory of the government, but the Auditor General's report indicates that when we have these kinds of tax cut programs, we've got to have clearly defined and measurable objectives. The government doesn't have those. They are just offering a tax cut to the very corporations that support them handsomely at election time. There's no benefit that the government has proven for the average individual Albertan from these corporate tax cuts.

So I would urge all members of the Assembly to vote against Bill 41 because it's fiscally irresponsible and does not represent the best interests of the vast majority of Albertans, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions? Comments?

If none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise, too, this afternoon to participate in the debate on Bill 41. My remarks certainly will not take as long, and I hope they're not as flat as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands'.

Mr. Mason: Flat?

Mr. MacDonald: As flat. Saskatchewan is a wonderful place, but it's flat. Certainly, for the New Democrats in Saskatchewan I think their greatest insurance – and we're going to talk about insurance here in a minute or two – against defeat is the past record of the Progressive Conservative government there.

Mr. Mason: The ones in jail, you mean?

Mr. MacDonald: Yes.

However, in regard to the Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act and what has been stated by the previous speaker, one has to at all times recognize the important contribution that small businesses make to the Alberta economy. Small businesses are under siege right now from a government that seems to be more willing to fly away than it is to stick around and try to resolve the problems, some of the financial problems that small businesses find themselves in, Mr. Speaker. The Lenny Kaplan tax cuts that are advocated in here are just what they need at this time.

They are faced with rising costs for WCB. The utility costs: I'm not going to get into that. We talked about a report from Quebec earlier this afternoon, and to our amazement we find that for power consumers in this province the study concludes that without a doubt we have some of the highest prices in Canada for customers using electricity for residential use. Also, the average price for some large

power customers, Edmonton, Alberta, for instance, is the highest in the country. It's the highest in the country, Mr. Speaker.

So when you look at some of the costs that, let's say, a small power customer would use, someone that is using, let's say, 40 kilowatts of electricity, a small business using that much electricity – and I don't know if they would go that high – is looking at a \$1,275 bill, even in Halifax. Nova Scotia was mentioned earlier this week in question period. In Halifax the same outfit would pay about \$100 less for their electricity. So that is just one indication of where small business, if we are to pass this bill, could use the savings in this tax cut. They could use it, certainly, for their utility costs, for the WCB, and insurance costs.

I regret to have to say this, but it's an ideal time to inform the government. The last time we informed the government – it was last November, as a matter of fact – of the crisis that was looming in the auto insurance industry, did they listen? No. I wish they had. I certainly wish they had, but they did not. So now, hopefully, they will learn from the past, Mr. Speaker.

The next insurance crisis is going to be in the high cost of commercial liability insurance, and what is this government going to do about it? Small business will need this tax cut for the utility costs. Where are they going to get the money to pay their increased insurance costs, if they can find someone to cover them? I've had three businesses approach me in the last two weeks, and to my astonishment they tell me that they can't get someone to carry their liability insurance. That will be the next test for this government. Now, they've failed, in my opinion to date, to pass the insurance tests and certainly have failed miserably to get some sort of handle on electricity prices and natural gas prices in this province for domestic consumers. So on the report card certainly they're going home this weekend with a dismal F, Mr. Speaker, on both of those issues.

4:40

In conclusion, I would certainly urge for the sake of no one else but the small businesses across this province that in light of the increased cost pressures they've had in operating their businesses because of government inaction, let's pass Bill 41, the Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act.

Thank you.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for third reading carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:41 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The chair stands to be corrected, but I understand that if you are in the Chamber, you either vote for the motion or oppose the motion. If you wish to abstain, then presumably you're at some other place.

Dr. Taft: I'll vote with my party and the caucus. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, would you confirm that you voted in support of the motion?

Dr. Taft: Yes. I confirm that. Thanks.

For the motion:

Ady	Haley	Mar
Amery	Hancock	Marz
Calahasen	Hlady	Maskell
Cao	Horner	McClellan
Cardinal	Hutton	Nelson
Carlson	Jacobs	Pham
Coutts	Knight	Smith
Dunford	Kryczka	Stevens
Fritz	Lougheed	Taft
Gordon	Lund	Woloshyn
Graham	MacDonald	Yankowsky
Griffiths	Magnus	Zwozdesky

Against the motion:

Mason

Totals: For – 36 Against – 1

[Motion carried; Bill 41 read a third time]

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

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's been a very good first week of the fall session, so given the good progress that has been made and given the very large snowfall that has made roadways very difficult to manoeuvre and knowing full well that many of our colleagues have many miles to go tonight – and we want to ensure that they get to their constituencies safely – I would move that we call it 5:30 and that the Assembly stand adjourned until 1:30 p.m. Monday, November 24.

[Motion carried; at 4:55 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]