

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Monday, March 20, 2006

8:00 p.m.

Date: 06/03/20

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: Please be seated.

head: **Motions Other than Government Motions**

Request for Unanimous Consent

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, before proceeding to the debate on Motion 504, the chair wants to comment about Motion Other than Government Motion 505, which in the ordinary course of events would be considered by the Assembly on the evening of Monday, April 3, 2006. The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills, who is proposing the motion, asked late last week that he be allowed to amend it. The request arrived in the Speaker's office last Thursday but did not make it in today's Order Paper. Under Standing Order 39.2(2) notice of the amendment "must appear on the Order Paper not less than 4 sitting days before the motion is moved."

All members should have the proposed amended Motion 505 on their desks. As the motion will not be debated until two weeks from today, the chair would ask for unanimous consent to waive Standing Order 39.2(2).

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Acting Speaker: Although motions other than government motions appear only in Monday's Order Paper, the chair will arrange to have the amended motion appear in tomorrow's Order Paper.

The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmor.

Emergency Services

504. Rev. Abbott moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to encourage municipalities to provide minimum standards of fire, rescue, and recovery services.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to open the debate on Motion 504. One of the key functions of government is to ensure that public safety is enhanced and protected in every way possible. This is by no means a simple task. As society evolves and changes, our protective institutions must also change.

Fire departments serve many functions in today's world, only one of which is putting out fires. Firefighters serve as first-line responders in all sorts of emergencies, from car accidents to water rescues. It is a challenging and dangerous job. Albertans depend on these brave men and women to act decisively and competently in emergencies that are often matters of life and death. In most cases, in the vast majority of cases, Mr. Speaker, firefighters are well prepared and well equipped to deal decisively with these emergencies. Like anything else, however, there is always room for improvement, thus the impetus for Motion 504.

Currently the Ministry of Municipal Affairs, the Alberta fire commissioner's office, and the Fire Services Advisory Committee work closely with municipalities in respect to fire and rescue services. As the operation, financing, and practices of fire departments are municipal responsibilities, these organizations are not generally concerned with micromanaging departments but, rather, providing guidance to them. Through the development and promo-

tion of guidelines and a series of field mentoring staff, these organizations encourage municipal fire departments to operate efficiently and in a way that best reflects the protective needs of the population they protect. Motion 504 seeks to build on the good work already accomplished under this system by further urging municipalities to adopt minimum standards for fire, rescue, and recovery services.

One purpose of the motion is to open a dialogue on potential deficiencies in the current system. Currently there is a host of confusing regulations, which, while they are relatively comprehensive, have the potential to allow situations where public safety may be at undue risk. There are provisions in labour law, for example, that make some degree of training necessary for firefighters. Perhaps we could build on this by aggressively encouraging training to a certified standard. This would enable more volunteer firefighters to enhance both their safety and the safety of those they protect in areas such as rural Alberta.

There's also the matter of equipment, Mr. Speaker. Right now vehicles used for fire, rescue, and recovery services must meet transportation standards, which is a great start. Right now departments are encouraged to have equipment appropriate to their situational needs. Now, that's good. It's okay, but we can always do better. For example, a 30-year-old fire truck might be road-worthy. It might meet existing codes and guidelines. But in today's world it may not be enough. How do we know? There are no minimum standards. Whether it is or isn't, I think there's always room to live up discussion on the subject and to push for something better.

There is no requirement for a department to possess up-to-date life-saving equipment either, like the jaws of life, for example. I think the name of this equipment speaks for itself. Maybe we should look at more actively encouraging every department to adopt as a minimum standard the possession of this and other vital equipment, like diving gear, for example. If a child were to fall through the ice of a dugout, Mr. Speaker, can he or she really wait the extra time it would take for that equipment to come from a larger centre? In an emergency time is critical. Every minute counts. So does every little bit of motivation that we can provide to improve the current situation.

Another area that might be discussed is the distribution of fire, rescue, and recovery services in a municipality. Population distributions change. Let's face it. Alberta is enormous. Some of the rural municipalities have to cover a huge area. Maybe we should be more vocal in encouraging them to aggressively study how best to locate their equipment and personnel. Should they have two trucks or three? How big should those trucks be? How many firefighters should be trained and ready to go in a given situation or in a given area?

Mr. Speaker, I've only scratched the surface with these few examples, but I think I've made my point. There are literally thousands of things we can do to facilitate improvement. With this motion I believe we hold in our hands a powerful tool to do just that.

Mr. Speaker, Motion 504 is urging the government to "encourage municipalities to provide minimum standards of fire, rescue, and recovery services." Now, that might sound a bit vague, but there's a reason for that. I've worded the motion in this way so as not to limit its possibilities. Words like "encourage" and "minimum standards" are fairly open-ended words, and that's exactly why they were chosen. Fire services have evolved over the years. Some areas have rural fire co-ops; others don't. In studying this issue, I have learned that municipalities are responsible for funding and operating their own fire, rescue, and recovery departments. We've given them that power, and we don't want to intrude on it unnecessarily. This

is why we encourage instead of demand. It's more productive. Minimum standards were chosen because these words will serve to open a dialogue on potential deficiencies in the current system. It is not specific on purpose. I want to inspire as much discussion as possible on areas of concern so that we can work toward fixing them by any means necessary, so that we can work together in this area.

I want to urge this government to add to the encouragement already being given to municipalities. We have a framework. We have tools in place. What I am proposing is a further filling in of that framework with increased co-operation between municipalities, fire departments, and the government. I want us, in short, to add to the toolbox we already have and help our front-line fire and rescue workers build a better Alberta, a safer Alberta.

As I said before, Mr. Speaker, in the quest for public safety we can always do better. I believe that by supporting Motion 504, we can not only encourage further discussions on means of improving current practices; we can also build on the steps we've already taken. We need to. Together we can raise the bar of public safety with all the means at our disposal. I believe this motion is a step in the right direction.

Mr. Speaker, my sincere hope is that we will see co-operation, camaraderie, and improved service throughout Alberta as a result of passing this motion tonight. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.
8:10

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise on behalf of the Official Opposition this evening and give a response to Motion 504. First of all, I would like to thank the mover of the motion, the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, for bringing forward an idea that, I think, is certainly in the best interest of the public in Alberta and must be supported in principle. However, as one might expect, I do have some comments and concerns about the motion, particularly the way it's worded, but in principle I support the concept of what this motion is trying to accomplish.

Mr. Speaker, municipalities in this province are already stretched to the maximum when it comes to providing services. We know that as MLAs. We all hear that in our offices. I'm sure that I'm not the only one, and I'm quite sure that opposition MLAs are not the only MLAs that hear that. It's a steady refrain from across the province. Whenever we attend meetings with the AUMA or the AAMD and C, this is a common concern that's expressed to all MLAs. If years of downloading by the provincial government and the federal government – in all fairness, the federal government has downloaded as well – and decreased financial support have put such an extra tremendous burden on the municipalities, the first question that jumps out at you, of course, with this motion and some of the things that the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar spoke about in terms of equipment, you know, newer and better fire trucks and a standard of having a jaws of life in every municipality and so forth: those are all good things, but obviously somebody has to pay for them. That hasn't been addressed at all either in the motion or in the comments that the Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar made.

He gave a little bit of an explanation toward the end of his speech this evening about the vagueness of the motion and why it is that way. I'll just point out one glaring problem with the vagueness of the motion, Mr. Speaker. It talks about minimum standards of fire, rescue, and recovery services, but there's no explanation at all as to what those minimum standards might be. In fact, it's so vague that one could interpret it to be either minimum standards across the province or allowing each municipality to set their own minimum

standards. I think the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar would agree that those two scenarios are entirely different: if we have one set of standards that is the minimum for every municipality and every individual that lives in this province or if we allow each single municipality to set their own minimum level of standards. I'm going to trust and assume that the member meant province-wide standards. That would make sense to me. If we're allowing each individual municipality to set their own minimum, I'm not so sure that I could support this motion.

Of course, if we establish, in fact, that these are province-wide minimum standards, then the next question is: how would we establish those, how would they be met, and, as I said, most importantly really, who is going to pay for the implementation of those standards? We know that municipalities at this point are already desperately seeking alternative sources of reliable and sustainable funding. To add more financial responsibility to the burden that they're already facing would, without question, just exacerbate what is already a very grave problem for many, if not all, municipalities.

A question in my mind is where this idea is coming from. I was hoping that the member might address it in his comments, and he didn't. I'm not sure if we'll have an opportunity at some point to hear from him further, but I'm wondering if he consulted, in fact, with the AUMA or the AAMD and C, or maybe it was with his local council. I'm not sure. In the conversations I've had with members of the AUMA, they weren't aware of this at all. Not to pick on the Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar in particular, but I think, rather, I'd prefer to pick on the government as a whole.

An Hon. Member: Go ahead. Pick on him.

Mr. R. Miller: It's much more fun to pick on the government as a whole.

There seems to be a pattern, a fairly noticeable pattern in the year and a bit that I've been in this Assembly of the government not consulting with primary stakeholders on issues of relatively great importance. The most obvious example we have of that right now is, you know, an issue that we discuss daily in this Legislature, and that is the proposed changes to health care, the so-called third way. What I believe and certainly the correspondence I get into my office would indicate many Albertans believe is that there's either a lack of consultation or a very poorly disguised process that really is no substitute for public consultation. I'm not sure whether or not the Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar had an opportunity to consult with any of these groups that I've mentioned or perhaps others, but I would hope so because, as I say, there does seem to be a pattern here, and I would hope that we're not continuing to go down that road.

Mr. Speaker, there's no mention in the motion of police or ambulance service, and it would make me wonder, if we're going to establish minimum standards province-wide – and, again, I hope that that's what the intention is here – for fire and rescue and recovery services, that we would also have the same for police and ambulance service.

If I could just take a minute and talk about those two examples; most recently, of course, the almost takeover of the ambulance service by the province. What a disaster that whole thing was a year ago, and of course we're still waiting and probably will have to wait for some time to find out how that's all eventually going to be worked out. Clearly, there was an effort there to ensure province-wide standards and province-wide delivery of ambulance service, and it just hasn't happened. In fact, it's left many municipalities in disarray. I think it's perhaps a little better this year, but certainly a

year ago they were in total disarray in terms of their planning, not knowing exactly which way the province was going to go on that issue. I would hate to see the same thing happen as it relates to fire and rescue services.

Policing. We look at the RCMP as an example. There was no substantial increase in manpower for the RCMP for over 20 years until last year.

Mr. Bonko: How many years?

Mr. R. Miller: Twenty years without any substantial increase in manpower in the RCMP.

Of course, last year, following the tragedy out in Mayerthorpe, it sort of became the issue du jour, if I can call it that, and suddenly we saw an increase. It shouldn't take the death of four young men to raise our awareness and our sensitivity to the fact that our province is growing. As we grow, the level of crime and the type of crime that we see changes as well, and we have to keep up with that in terms of the resources we give our communities to police themselves.

Edmonton and Calgary still this year – maybe it'll change in the budget on Wednesday – as of right now are still being offered \$16 per capita for policing. No increase over the last five years. As I said, Mr. Speaker, certainly not only the number of crimes but the type of crime, the level of crime, and the severity of crime that we see, change as these two major cities grow. They've both reached that relatively critical mass of a million people, and when that happens, the comfortable little city that you grew up in doesn't feel like a little city anymore. We're now big, major league metropolises with major league problems, and not having an increase in the per capita funding over the last five years clearly doesn't address those problems that we're facing.

The next question I would have is whether or not, in fact, the standardization of resources for fire and rescue and recovery might perhaps be a veiled way of addressing issues like the Wabamun disaster and the fact that there didn't seem to be any co-ordinated response from the provincial government in that case, and maybe this is what's trying to be accomplished here.

It looks like I'm running out of time, Mr. Speaker, so I'll just say that while I will offer qualified support for this motion, I really wish it had said something like this: be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to implement province-wide minimum standards of fire, rescue, and recovery services for municipalities in full consultation with the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association and the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties and ensure that all municipalities have the resources necessary to implement such minimum standards.

Had we been a little more specific in terms of who we were consulting with to get there and how we were going to fund it, it would undoubtedly have received my unqualified support, Mr. Speaker. As it is, as I say, I can lend it qualified support, but I really wish that it was a little more specific, and I'm particularly concerned about the vagueness in the wording of the motion as it now sits.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

8:20

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

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, I want to talk to this motion from a little bit of a different point of view, and that's focusing on the recovery part of it. Right now in Alberta we've probably got one of the world-class facilities to train firefighters.

Thankfully, it's located in Vermilion, but it's trained just about all of the firefighters in Alberta. It does a very good job, and Albertans can go to bed at night knowing that there are a very dedicated group of professionals out there to look after that aspect of safety. We also have an incredibly dedicated group of police officers, RCMP, in Alberta that also give people a great deal of comfort and do a very good job. Although many of the different fire departments are made up of volunteers, I think it's safe to say that they could probably go against most professional firefighters anywhere in the world.

So it's not that we don't have very good people in all corners of Alberta, but what we're missing, Mr. Speaker, in my personal experience, is a co-ordinated effort to invoke a recovery or in some cases a rescue. I think it wouldn't take very much for the province to activate some training or to encourage some people to learn what's involved in a recovery and co-ordinate these two bodies.

Mr. Speaker, last August at Muriel Lake in Bonnyville we had a friend of ours drown. I can tell you that as hurtful as it is to go through it, and I wish no one else ever has to, I was as disappointed in the government of Alberta's response to that as anything I've ever been disappointed in in my life. It was virtually nonexistent.

Now, the people that showed up, the volunteer firefighters from Bonnyville, were there as fast as they could be there. They didn't have a boat. They had a small drag hook in a lake that covers 50 square miles, and they were willing, but they didn't know how to contribute to that recovery. The RCMP showed up quickly. They, too, had a boat but really no idea how to put in place any kind of a recovery grid or method or organize the volunteers. The fish and wildlife conservation officer showed up the next day. I can say nothing bad about anyone who was there. Their intentions were great. They didn't have the machines or the technology or the ability to co-ordinate, and I think that it says to me that we need to move our fire and rescue people under the Solicitor General so that one department co-ordinates these activities. The name has been changed to Solicitor General and Ministry of Public Security.

I think that we do ourselves a disservice to think that it just takes more money all the time to do better things. That's not true. Sometimes we need to take an inventory of what we've got in people, in products, and available boats, whatever would be needed in a particular recovery, and have someone there who can explain to the families and the people involved: this is what you can expect; this is what you can't expect. It's not very prudent, Mr. Speaker, to send out a heat-seeking helicopter the day after they've drowned and then have them say: well, quite frankly, we can't locate them two hours after they're in there. You give them hope; you take it away.

Many people become experts on this kind of thing as they work. I mean, I don't believe that it's not well-intentioned, but information about: how long does it take for a body to surface? What should you do? What could you do? How do you develop a grid so that people with cameras – I mean, if you have GPS and you have a boat that's equipped and you can do it, that's great. At one time I think we had around 16 boats out there trying to do this, but there was no one from the Alberta government in any capacity that was suggesting or telling us how to do this. People shouldn't be trying on their own to invent flotation devices that might mirror what a human body does. Surely we can do that and then give that information out to the different fire departments or whatever recovery group is there.

Granted, cost is a real, real driver. Mr. Speaker, if the Bonnyville fire department were in charge of the 10-day rescue, it would probably take all of their budget to look for someone who is not part of their community at a lake outside of their town. It would be very unfair to suggest that fire departments could be put in a huge deficit because of trying to do the right thing. I think the Alberta government needs to look at that and determine if there are circumstances

where we need to fund these searches or to have people there to help co-ordinate them. It certainly shouldn't put the municipality in a detrimental position.

Albertans rise to the top in times of crisis, and I'll guarantee you that every community is like that. We have unbelievable people that show up. Many days there, Mr. Speaker, we had over a hundred people, at times up to 150 people there trying to offer their services: what can we do? Quads and boats and spotting scopes and people bringing food. It happens everywhere in Alberta. It's not exclusive to me, but at that point it makes you very, very proud to be a part of that community.

Here are the people and the co-ordinating people – it's really unfair to single out some, but I have to say that a fellow named Bert Samuelson who works at Lakeland College in Vermilion just dropped his life for 10 days and worked with the people. Unfortunately, Bert's dad passed away today. Also, Milt Anderson, who worked at Webb's of Vermilion: 10 days. Their wives and their other families. People dropped their lives and sat there helping the family. And what did we do? Nothing. It just isn't right.

It's not a knock on our fire department and our municipalities not meeting standards. We have it. We've got a lot of it. Maybe if you're not on a highway, you don't need the fancy jaws of life, and maybe if there are no lakes in your constituency or your area, sir, you don't need a recovery boat or someone to do that, but it wouldn't be a big stretch to train half a dozen or twelve of these people that are probably in our fire departments now or in our police departments and have them available to move to an area where tragedies have happened and help co-ordinate and at least explain to the families what they can expect: this is what happens.

Let's not waste the resources. If there is no point in divers, don't do it. The divers that came there from the volunteer group here in Edmonton were unbelievable. They worked so hard trying to locate it. They often came back on our boat and collapsed, utterly exhausted. This is not a criticism, but they had very little help from us, I guess. We didn't know what to do. Finally, we get more divers. You finally start to develop grid patterns. You develop ways to pull them through the lake so you can cover more ground and save oxygen. But you shouldn't be reinventing the wheel.

We need one of the departments to bring this together under one block and say: here's what we do; here are the best practices when you're involved, unfortunately, in one of these circumstances, and that isn't there now. I would say that if this happened in Edmonton or Calgary or virtually any other town and you were told, "Well, you just have to wait; in 10 days they'll come up," I don't think that would be good enough.

Now, sometimes it's impossible. There are people who go through the lakes in the winter. There are people who fall into rivers. You know what? You can't die if you don't live. It's unfortunate. But when you're in a lake that's 10 feet deep, 17 at its deepest – and I want to talk to the minister that's got water about that – you'd think that there would be someone that could show up and say: "Here would be the best practices to set out a grid. Here are the people that are going to go around the lake and talk to the people, ask if they saw anything, and they're going to put that information through the co-ordinator right here, and he's going to keep the family in touch. He's going to make sure that they understand what's going on, and he'll make sure that we're not wasting our time, wasting our resources." So someone who understands it.

I don't think that every motion or every sentence in it needs to be taken to: what can go wrong? I think we need to look at some motions as: what can we do right? If co-ordinating the fire, the rescue, and the recovery under one department would make it better,

it will probably save a little money. Mr. Speaker, until you go through this, you don't realize how many people you'll run into that will say: well, the same thing happened to us, and here's what we had to do.

There are lakes where your loved ones will be taken to a certain area. Well, if the family knows that, that's great. But if the widow and the family that were at our campground didn't have to stay there and didn't have the huge support that her family was, what would she have done? I guess she would have sat at the end of the pier and waited. It just isn't what you want to put a dollar figure on. You want to be able to say: we showed up, and we did the very best we could because we were trained in co-ordinating the volunteers and the professionals that we had to do it.

Mr. Speaker, there's no magic bullet, but I would just say that I would hope the Assembly would support the intent of this motion.

8:30

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, followed by Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise to speak to this motion this evening. You know, like the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, I must support this in principle. The need to ensure that there are "standards of fire, rescue, and recovery services" in all municipalities is a laudable objective for our province. I look at this motion, and I wonder how it will achieve that. I think it is essentially pretty weak and ineffectual in terms of trying to achieve that. Minimum standards for delivery of fire, rescue, and recovery services are a good idea, but the questions are: what will these minimum standards be, and who will develop them?

If the province and the provincial government want minimum standards, then it is the responsibility of the provincial government to establish what these standards are, and then they must ensure that the municipalities have the necessary capabilities, both in terms of finances and personnel, to meet these standards. If the responsibility for this is downloaded to municipalities, then they have to have the ability to meet these standards.

Municipalities should not be left with the responsibility to implement the standards because there will then be differing minimum standards across the province based upon the existing capabilities of that particular municipality. St. Albert might be able to do something which would require a fair amount of resources; other communities, counties, municipalities may not be able to. The reality is that if the province wants all municipalities to adopt and meet a minimum standard for fire, rescue, and recovery services, then it is the province that needs to establish such a standard, and they should do so in full consultation with the AUMA and the AAMD and C and then provide the funding necessary for those municipalities that cannot meet these standards.

You know, there was talk earlier that some municipalities may not need certain capabilities in terms, perhaps, of divers or whatever, even the jaws of life, but I think all of them have accidents that would require that. All of the municipalities and counties, indeed all of the municipal governments in our province have lakes and sloughs and dugouts and rivers and could benefit from having a true standard set up that would cover all the local governments in our great province.

You know, I believe the wording that was put out by the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford would be a far stronger wording and a far more effective wording in trying to ensure that the actual intent of this motion actually comes into play. Sometimes it does take a bit more money, and sometimes it takes some specifics in order to get some real advances made in terms of public safety and in terms of providing a better standard for all Albertans.

Indeed, there will always be the great volunteer added to the great ability of Albertans to jump into things and try and make things better to save those who are in need and to help them when we have natural disasters and tragic circumstance. I think it is one of the characteristics of Albertans that we will always jump in and do that sort of thing no matter what or where we are in this province.

I'm encouraged by the Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar talking about the importance of perhaps bringing all the firefighters across the province to the union standard. It is encouraging to hear him say that. You know, we do need some minimum standards all across the board.

With that, Mr. Speaker, although the intent of the motion is good, and we must support it for its basic principle, I think that it will be ineffectual in reaching its end if it stays with that particular wording. Thank you.

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

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also appreciate the opportunity to stand and speak in support of Motion 504. I would like to take this opportunity, at first, to congratulate the Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar for introducing this outstanding proposal.

An Hon. Member: Well said; very well said.

Mr. Prins: Thank you.

There are some great examples across this province that illustrate the potential benefits of this motion. I would like to highlight one of them: the Lacombe Regional Fire Service. This organization that serves within my riding of Lacombe-Ponoka, is a true success story that I believe can be used as a model for many other regions across the province.

The goal of the Lacombe Regional Fire Service is to continually strive to reduce the frequency and severity of emergency incidents within their service area in order to shield their communities from the damaging effects of these events. For this organization their mission statement is more than just a slick phrase; it's part of their planning process and the reality of their action.

The Lacombe Regional Fire Service was the result of a thorough investigative review by Lacombe county, the town of Lacombe, and the Lacombe fire department. These three partners joined to become the founding members of the fire service which they envisioned. However, they did not limit their success by restricting membership. Instead, they welcomed expansion and created a fire and rescue network that serves surrounding communities and the rural areas between these communities. As such, the Lacombe Regional Fire Service has grown to include the village of Clive, the village of Alix, the town of Eckville, and most recently the town of Bentley. The village of Mirror was a member before dissolution – now they're part of the county – and the Lacombe Regional Fire Service is looking to bring Blackfalds into the organization in the near future, so then it will encompass all the urban municipalities within the county.

Lacombe acts as the main hub for the administrative services, allowing all of the communities within the organization to be well connected and well served. This means that the entire area covered by the Lacombe Regional Fire Service has capabilities that far outreach those which would be achieved by individual communities. However, the small towns in the region are not seen as peripheral or satellites; they are seen as partners, with each community fire department playing an important role in serving the designated area.

Despite its size the organization still relies totally on the support of volunteers, with the regional fire chief being the only serving

employee. In part he is responsible for providing technical advice to the organization's board of directors, which is comprised of elected representatives from major member groups.

I can personally attest to the fact that the Lacombe Regional Fire Service is a first-class operation from top to bottom. The success story of the Lacombe Regional Fire Service was built under the current governing system we have in place for fire and rescue services in Alberta. This does not mean that the treatment of these organizations and the standards they operate under are flawless. I believe we need to be constantly searching for ways to improve.

Being content with the status quo eliminates the opportunity for progress. That's the premise behind Motion 504. While there are great fire and rescue services in this province, some are falling behind. These organizations need new ideas and encouragement. Communities need to focus more attention on their fire and rescue services, making them the priority they need to be. Ignoring this issue would be a big mistake.

I'm not saying that every municipality should necessarily adopt the exact system of the Lacombe region because the situation is not that simple. Alberta is a diverse province, and to some extent unique solutions need to be found for each region. However, the overlying concepts of the regional fire service can be applied to nearly all areas. In my discussions with the Lacombe county officials they expressed their beliefs that the structure and dealings of their fire service are applicable to most regions. For example, the Member for Peace River has areas within his constituency in which travel time between communities is measured in hours instead of minutes. In these types of areas populations are smaller, limiting human resources and decreasing the tax base. Nonetheless, the concepts of sharing information, training facilities, business plans, communication plans, income and economic plans, and performance measures are still extremely valid. In fact, in these relatively remote areas co-operation and sharing these types of resources is even more important.

8:40

I just would like to add that in my work with the Lacombe Regional Fire Service – I was a member of it at one time – one of the main things that we did was get together in practice sessions. We would bring all of the firefighters from the different villages and towns together, and they would plan the co-ordination of their equipment, the co-ordination of their radios, their communications. They would build a comradery that would strengthen them for the times when they would have to deal with emergencies in joint force.

They would set policies as to who would be in control of situations if there was a multidepartment response, and they had policies in place that would determine who would pay for a multforce response because there's always the problem of who pays for these things. This is because small communities have huge volunteer demands, and as a result fire and rescue crews are difficult to attain. The training these brave citizens require is typically only available from the Alberta Fire Training School in Vermilion, making time and cost an issue for small municipalities. The Lacombe Regional Fire Service would bring in training to its fire departments, directly to the villages or towns, making the lives of everyone involved much easier and saving time and money for these municipalities.

Motion 504 can help facilitate this sort of progress. With the carrying of this motion, we will open the doors for all municipalities to establish first-class fire and rescue networks. I don't think we need to spend a lot of money to accomplish this. We just have to start working together to train and plan and co-ordinate and find efficiencies in any way possible. In fact, when we do this, we might even save money. Instead of costing more, it might cost us less to do this.

Working together is part of Alberta's history. It's an age-old way of making the most of what we each have individually to create the greatest good for all. Co-operation is an important concept to consider in every activity, especially for something that impacts all of our lives like fire and rescue systems do. Although some of our members here would like to see the wording stronger in this motion and would like to see it more prescriptive, I believe that the actual decisions that have to be made are political decisions that have to be made at local levels, in local municipalities. They will have to decide how far they want to go, how much money they want to spend, and how much equipment they want to invest in, so I want to leave that up to the local municipalities.

For these reasons I've outlined, Mr. Speaker, I will be supporting Motion 504. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, followed by Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to stand and speak to Motion 504 this evening, and I appreciate the Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar and his intent and his desire in this motion. There have been many good discussions brought forward. I guess the one that excites me the most in all of this is the fact that we realize that we live in a diverse province. Too often we're in remote areas, and accidents happen, and we wonder: how do we resolve these problems?

My biggest concern with this is that we just went through the ambulance fiasco saying that we need to have standards across the province, and as soon as we brought that up, we realized all of a sudden that it's not a \$55 million program, it's \$110 million, and even at that they weren't sure. It really worries me when they say, "Provide minimum standards." I could support this wholly if we were to make an amendment for municipalities to provide recommended standards, realizing that in rural Alberta in many areas they're not able to meet those minimum standards.

There are small communities with just 50, 100 people living there. They have a fire truck, they have a boat, and they've bought these other pieces of equipment. They've raised the money because of disasters in their communities, and they have them there, yet the minimum standard might say: well, it has to be a 16-foot boat. So all of a sudden they're not allowed to go out because of these minimum standards.

I have great fear for the smaller communities in rural Alberta that if, in fact, you place minimum standards, they'll be eliminated. We've gone through the Walkerton episode with the water treatment plant. New standards have been put in place, and it's very onerous on some of the smaller hamlets and small communities to try to meet those new standards when, in fact, their water is okay.

It just doesn't work to have a blanket program saying, "These are the new minimum standards" when it's easy for Edmonton and Calgary or perhaps Lethbridge to meet those, but the smaller areas cannot have it anymore. I'm very concerned when we say, "minimum standards." I see that that often turns into maximum amount of money, and therefore we can't operate or have some of these firemen or ambulances in our communities because we no longer meet the minimum standards. I think that it's sad when we do that to communities and tell them, "Your way of life is outdated, and you can't live that way anymore," because what it is is it's shutting down those small communities, and people have to leave because of the new minimum standards.

So the intent and the desire to provide safety to Albertans and to have rescue and fire and recovery services is excellent. I like the idea from the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster that perhaps

what we need is to have emergency response teams in different areas of the province that can go out and help these small communities and have experts available.

To put in those minimum standards: I'm very apprehensive about that. I think that it'll do more harm than good in the small rural areas. So I would encourage us to reconsider that and to change it to have recommended standards, to have facilities and places where people can go and receive the training.

Another huge help would be to give tax credits or other areas to these volunteer people who put an immense amount of time and effort and money into keeping their areas alive. We need to help them in that way, not necessarily saying that you're no longer qualified and we're going to shut down your rescue or fire department because you no longer meet the minimum standards.

So with that slight change to provide recommended standards and to have easier access to training, I'd be happy to support this motion, and I look forward to more debate on this one. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul, followed by Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very glad to be able to stand and take part in the debate on Motion 504. I'd like to also assure the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar that fire prevention and fire support in rural areas is a passion with volunteers. I want to say that it is probably one of the most important issues for individuals in rural Alberta, and I know that it may sound as if I'm speaking against motherhood when I make a couple of comments that question some of the directions of this motion.

Urging municipalities to provide a minimum standard for fire and rescue services is an important issue, and I very much appreciate the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar bringing up this issue. I also understand the intentions of the member in bringing forward this motion. I have some questions about some of the practicality in rural Alberta but especially in remote areas of Alberta.

We talk about regular standards. I was the chairman of the fire department in our area for approximately six or seven years. What happened: under that fire department we had communities that partnered with aboriginal communities in order that we could provide a service. If you had standards and regulations that asked each and every one of those communities to have a certain standard, then I don't think there would be fire departments in some of those areas, and they would have to be left up to larger communities. The time that it would take for those individual fire departments to get there would be way too long for any sort of feasible control.

Mr. Speaker, today in our province we have 431 fire departments.

Mr. Lukaszuk: How many?

Mr. Danyluk: Four hundred and thirty-one. Approximately 85 per cent – and I stress to you 85 per cent – of these organizations are staffed by volunteers. These community fire departments pride themselves on the services that they provide and just do not have the means to be able to meet any further standards. As we know, if it's possible, they will do it. Right now I have fire departments in my area that are running bingos and casinos, fund raising to upgrade their equipment. Should there be a standard? Maybe yes, if the government is willing to provide some support, but if they're not willing to provide the support, those individuals can't afford to do it.

8:50

Mr. Speaker, training is an integral part of any firefighter's career. In our area we have collaborated with the regional fire communities or municipalities and provided services and training in co-operation

with the excellent school out of Vermilion. They have done a tremendous job of training and have provided some very needed equity in regard to knowledge. I don't want to correct the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster, but part of that training very much involves the co-ordination of fire departments and their involvement in search and rescue and firefighting and some co-ordination with the community.

I want to say that if we did have standards – and I say the standards that seem to be brought forward – I just don't see how it would at all be possible to . . . [interjections] Sorry, Mr. Speaker. It's just a little distraction.

Certain equipment is also regulated under these pieces of legislation, and vehicles used in firefighting and rescue services are also regulated in a number of ways. For example, under the transportation act, as mentioned by the hon. member that presented this motion, vehicles must be noteworthy – and I think that is very important – and remain so throughout the course of their use or firefighting practices. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, it is not as if the rural firefighter departments or any fire department for that matter go completely unregulated and without standards for staff and equipment.

Under the Department of Municipal Affairs Alberta has an Alberta fire commissions office that oversees the Alberta Fire Services Advisory Committee. Mr. Speaker, this committee helps to ensure that our municipal fire departments provide an appropriate level of fire service within their regions. They provide a great deal of information and assistance to those in the field. For example, they develop and publish information packages on how to establish and operate a fire department and on how they have individuals that go through the fire departments to ensure that they are operating in a manner that meets the accepted practices. Therefore, these municipal fire departments have support, and most do the best job they possibly can.

I believe, Mr. Speaker, that the problems municipalities have with their firefighting and rescue services or lack thereof are actually few and far between. While there are, no doubt, some situations where municipal fire departments could improve the level of service they provide as a whole, I feel that these groups provide a very excellent service both in firefighting and rescue services. In turn, as a province we provide them with ample tools to do so. Without providing provincial funding for municipal firefighting departments, especially in rural areas, I do not see how it will be possible for the majority of these groups to meet increased standards if such standards were encouraged.

Mr. Speaker, we heard today discussions about Lacombe, Edmonton, Calgary, Drayton Valley, Bonnyville, Peace River. Now, these communities are large communities and have the ability to support firefighting services and equipment. I am mostly speaking on behalf of the small communities that do not have the abilities, that rely on other communities to help them out, and they are there as support. They are there as suboffices or subdepartments. We cannot put too many standards or restrictions on those individuals. To ask a hardworking, dedicated crew of firefighters, the majority of whom are working in a voluntary capacity, to give even more of their time in additional training is really hardly fair. As I said, in our area we do not have anyone that is in a paid position except the chief, who was just hired to overlook and help with the training. So, you know, some of the comments the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar had talked about, that we need to train more – that is happening already, and if there are places where it isn't happening, maybe there should be some support in that direction.

As well, to ask municipalities to come up with more money to finance these small fire departments may be pushing them just a

little bit far. I know that most of the municipalities support firefighting to the best of their abilities. If you go throughout the communities and I know that if you go throughout my constituency, there are so many that have provided great effort in the support of their fire departments.

Mr. Speaker, I guess it is good to talk about equity, it is good to talk about consistency in firefighting, and it's good to talk about standards. I could support this motion if there was some latitude in the acceptability of standards from different communities because I think that if we equalize standards, then the communities in remote areas, especially my communities, will not be able to afford to have any sort of firefighting. So I want to support the individuals that are there, that are trying to protect the homes of the community, that are trying to protect the community.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and speak to this motion put forward by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar. I find, as I listen to the debate on both sides from the one side of the House, that the issue is becoming a little bit clarified in my mind.

Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that people of Alberta, regardless of where they live, whether they live in a rural area or in an urban area, deserve a reasonable level of fire and rescue service. They deserve, whether or not they live in an area with a volunteer firefighting system or a trained professional system, at least a minimum standard. That's not to say that the standard can be the same across the province. Obviously, in a highly dense urban area there's going to be faster response than otherwise. I don't believe that this is a question of putting a greater burden on local municipalities or on volunteer firefighters. I don't think that that is what the hon. member intends by his motion. In fact, I would say that I believe that volunteer firefighters would welcome assistance that could be provided to them that would allow them to do their job better. They are involved in that because they care about the people in their community and they want to save lives, and anything that this government can do, it should do in order to assist them and to ensure that all people in rural Alberta have a decent and minimum standard of emergency care.

The problem is – and I think that's why this motion has been somewhat modified by the mover – that there is an implied requirement that if the government chooses to do this, it has a financial obligation. I think it's high time that the government recognize that it has that obligation.

Mr. Speaker, just in conclusion – I know that the time is running out – I want to say that while I think that the motion does not address the resource issue and the responsibility of the government, it should be passed. It's a good first step.

9:00

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, I've just been advised that because of the first vote that we had, there are still another three minutes if you wanted to conclude your thoughts.

Mr. Mason: I'll allow if there's another member.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Government Services.

Mr. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I want to thank the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar for bringing this motion

forward. It's creating some good discussion, so I appreciate what he's done.

Reading it, it says, "Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to encourage municipalities to provide minimum standards of fire, rescue, and recovery services." A very fine motherhood statement, and of course I would never ever think of arguing against motherhood.

Mr. Speaker, I think that it's important to recognize that I would hope what the hon. member is talking about is allowing each municipality to set the standards that they think they can attain. If we start setting standards across the province and/or a number of municipalities like the AUMA or the AAMDs and Cs are figuring out the standards, we're going to have great difficulty in a lot of areas because most of these people are volunteers. In fact, to impose on them standards that would require a lot of training, you end up with almost having to have full-time people on staff. Quite frankly, the municipalities simply cannot afford to do that, so I think it's really important that the municipalities have that ability.

Some have mentioned the training. I think it is really important, and I think it's really the role of the provincial government to assist in the training. Of course, there's a lot of that happening today, but probably there could be more done.

I know that in the county that I'm in, they have a regional director for services, and that person looks after all of the fire departments, does the co-ordinating.

There's one area that has been mentioned a couple of times: rescue. Well, Mr. Speaker, in the Rocky constituency we have that vast area in the west country. There is a search and rescue group that are volunteers, and they have taken a lot of training. Through donations – and I have helped them in some of the government programs to get various equipment. Quite frankly, if we were going to offer a real high standard there, that would require a lot of dollars, a lot of training.

Sometimes I have a little difficulty understanding why taxpayers should have to pay for, in a lot of cases, some dumb decisions by the public. For example, why on earth do people riding skidoos go up on the high elevations and trigger snowslides and then expect taxpayers to pay to recover them? I think that there is a responsibility on the part of the individual to recognize some of those dangers so that, in fact, if they get in trouble, they pay to have themselves rescued. Often it requires a helicopter, and of course we end up paying for that.

The Acting Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Minister of Government Services, but under Standing Order 8(4), which provides for up to five minutes for the sponsor of a motion other than a government motion to close debate, I would invite the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar to close debate on Motion 504.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I really would sincerely like to thank all of those who participated in the debate tonight. I thought it was an excellent debate. I would really like to thank the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster for his excellent and very supportive comments as well as the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka. I thought he made some great, great points. The Member for Rocky Mountain House was just outstanding. Even the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood was very supportive, and I appreciate him.

With regard to the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul, well, he and I need to do some more talking, I think, Mr. Speaker. I think he needs to see that this motion really is aimed in the right direction. I have one question. The question is this: what if your best is not good enough? What if your best is not good enough? You see, I

really believe that minimum standards are our job. As a government that is certainly our job. We're the ones who have to set that province-wide standard. Minimum standards need to be set. There needs to be a benchmark.

We've heard about areas such as Lacombe-Ponoka that have found ways to work together. They've found ways to make it work with the existing dollars, not with any outside dollars but with the existing dollars that they have within their budget. They spend the money that they have, and they make a system that works, a system that is able to meet the needs of the community. I do recognize that the standards will vary from municipality to municipality. For some places it takes minutes to get across their rescue area. For other places it takes hours to get across their rescue area. So of course we need to be understanding that there will be a somewhat different standard depending on where you are, but there still have to be some minimums provided.

The whole thing where this bill came from, Mr. Speaker, is that we had a little situation in my constituency where we found that there were two competing forces trying to provide for fire and rescue services in a portion of my constituency. One was sort of trying to take over from the other one, and one had kind of a higher standard than the other one. So they came to their MLA, and they said: "You know, who is right? What are the minimum standards for fire and rescue?" I guess that I was shocked to find out we didn't really have any.

Then I started to look into it, and I found out that there is a committee that's out there currently working on guidelines, working on recommendations, working on sort of provincial standards or provincial minimums that municipalities are going to be encouraged to meet. Again, it's not always an issue of money. Sometimes you can spend the money that you're currently spending in a more focused and in a wiser fashion.

I'm really thankful for the way we got to talk about this tonight, and I hope it's only a springboard. You know, motions generally are fairly vague, and motions are generally just encouraging in nature, but I really hope that this is just a springboard, that maybe we could talk more about this at the AUMA, at the AAMD and C. Maybe we can talk more about it in our own meetings as a government and even here on the floor of the Legislature. My hope is that we can work together with Municipal Affairs and with the Solicitor General to come to an amicable agreement on how we can put this forward and how we can make this work.

I guess, in closing, Mr. Speaker, that I believe that as legislators we must remain vigilant in regard to public safety by constantly aiming to improve the safety and well-being of the citizens of Alberta. We must ensure that all Albertans feel safe within their communities. It's extremely important for our citizens to have the peace of mind to function openly and freely, having the confidence of knowing that someone will be there to help in the case of an emergency or a crisis. Province-wide standards are our job as a government and as a Legislature, but municipalities are our partners. They are our friends. We have to work with them to see this come about.

I do encourage all members, even the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul, to support Motion 504. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 504 carried]

head: **Government Motions**

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

Mr. Zwodzesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to move

three government motions. I'll do them one at a time. As all members here would know, these are effectively adjournment-type motions, so they're not debatable.

Spring Recess

12. Mr. Zwozdesky moved on behalf of Mr. Hancock:
Be it resolved that when the Assembly adjourns on Thursday, March 23, 2006, at the regular hour of 5:30 p.m., it shall stand adjourned until Monday, April 3, 2006, at 1:30 p.m.

[Motion carried]

9:10 Easter Recess

13. Mr. Zwozdesky moved on behalf of Mr. Hancock:
Be it resolved that when the Assembly adjourns on Thursday, April 13, 2006, at the regular hour of 5:30 p.m., it shall stand adjourned until Monday, April 24, 2006, at 1:30 p.m.

[Motion carried]

Adjournment of Session

14. Mr. Zwozdesky moved on behalf of Mr. Hancock:
Be it resolved that when the Assembly adjourns to recess the spring sitting of the Second Session of the 26th Legislature, it shall stand adjourned until a time and date as determined by the Speaker after consultation with the Lieutenant Governor in Council.

[Motion carried]

head: Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 1 Alberta Cancer Prevention Legacy Act

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

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure on behalf of the hon. Premier to move Bill 1, the Alberta Cancer Prevention Legacy Act, at this stage, third reading.

I've already indicated to the House earlier, Mr. Speaker, what the potential impact of this act is and why I think it's incumbent upon all of us to support it. That having been said, I'll look forward to any other positive comments or observations that other members of the House might have and seek their concurrence at the end to have this proceed through third reading.

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

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to rise and speak about Bill 1 in third reading. Actually, it's the first time I've had the opportunity to speak about this bill. The effect of this bill will be to direct a considerable amount of money into a fund focused on cancer prevention initiatives, including, as the bill states, education, public policy development, and social marketing initiatives and the support of screening programs and a virtual research institute.

Everyone is in agreement that we have received tremendous benefits from medical research as it has developed, especially in the last few decades. In fact, demographers, those who trace the trends in population growth, have referred to the great health transition, the shift from short lives marked by early death caused by infectious

diseases like typhoid and smallpox to long lives marked by death from chronic diseases like heart disease and cancer. Well, Mr. Speaker, it is a huge trade-off. We, on the one hand, deem ourselves fortunate to be able to live long lives, but the downside is having to deal with chronic diseases like cancer. On the one hand, fighting infectious diseases like smallpox did not take long. If you lost the fight, it was over rather quickly, and if you won, there were no lasting effects. But with chronic diseases, which we encounter so much now in old age, the struggle is often slow and drawn out, lasting many weeks, months, or even years. This is the trade-off: a longer, healthier life followed by many more years of serious decline and often disability.

The reality that we face today is that the greater prevalence of chronic disease like cancer means rising costs in health care, so of course there has to be a greater investment of our money. Part of this is the high cost of medical technology. A common estimate is that 40 to 50 per cent of expenditure growth can be traced to increased costs in technology. Few of us would criticize this because it is obviously a societal good that we can keep finding new ways to help people fight disease.

For example – and I want to make a personal reference here – my mother, who passed away a number of years ago, had breast cancer twice in her lifetime. The first time, about 60 years ago, the treatment was successful given medical technology at the time, but it left her with many lingering effects of radiation sickness. The second time she had breast cancer, 40 years later, the treatment was also successful, and because medical technology had advanced and improved so much, there were few side effects. No one would disagree and oppose the fact that medical technology is improving the opportunities for people to deal with diseases like cancer.

However, the statistics on the rising costs of technology coupled with another statistic raise serious questions. Beginning in the 1970s, patients in the last year of their life consumed over 25 per cent of medical costs, and that seems to be an increasing trend. What is desperately needed in our society, I believe, is a frank, open, wide-ranging discussion of dying and death. Given all of the money that we put into the last year of our lives, it appears that the great enemy is death. We put more money by far into prolonging our life in the face of death than into the quality of life during our last days.

As Daniel Callahan, the outstanding medical ethicist, puts it, there is a great schism in our approach to chronic disease and death. On the one side is the research drive, and on the other side is palliative care. The research drive aims to find a cure for a lethal disease like cancer. Death is the enemy, not to be accepted. The research drive seems to treat death itself as a curable disease, as if it is merely a biological accident and can be controlled, prolonging life.

Of course, people die for a variety of reasons. One reason is that for the moment we do not have the cure, and research must go on and do its work. Another reason people die is because of bad health behaviours, bad lifestyle choices such as smoking. Many have mentioned in the debate on Bill 1 the importance of environmental factors influencing our health and contributing to disease. Of course, there are also genetic factors, which research is dealing with.

Bill 1, with its emphasis on cancer prevention and research, is one answer to the research drive. The bill's focus on prevention through education and increased screening for early detection is most important. No one, I think, in good conscience could oppose this bill. It's one answer to the research drive. But this is only one side of the challenge. I mentioned that there's a great schism in our approach to chronic disease and death. On the one side is the research drive. We want to invest in research and have the best medical technology, the best science available. On the other side is the palliative care movement. Mr. Speaker, I want to say just a few

words about that because this bill doesn't deal with that, and I think there should be an equal amount of investment in the palliative care side of the whole issue.

Palliative care as a movement became quite important in the 1990s. It's an attempt to work to pull the care of the dying back to its ancient roots of giving comfort and relieving suffering. In this movement death is not perceived as the great enemy; rather, death is seen as a part of life. The goal is to help the terminally ill to die more peacefully by taking them out of the cure-driven apparatus of modern medicine and allowing them to live in peace during their final days.

Mr. Speaker, another personal note. My father passed away a couple of years ago from pancreatic cancer. Fortunately, he was able to live in his apartment almost right to the very end with home care, with palliative care. I see that as a tremendous plus that the palliative care movement has given us.

Bill 1 only deals with one side of this schism. Governments must also invest in palliative care, not just on the research side, the drive to have the best research available. We must invest in palliative care. Granted, a lot of progress has been made with palliative care like hospices, pain management, and living wills. Mr. Speaker, much, much more needs to be done. Reasoned debate about the conditions of our long-term care and assisted living institutions is an important part of the overall approach to end-of-life care, and that debate has to continue to take place. Most research money goes toward combatting lethal diseases such as cancer, heart disease, and strokes, but what is also needed is the funding of research on mental health, arthritis, and osteoporosis, all of which actually affect more people and directly affect our quality of life.

If we focused more on the quality of life and less on the length of life, we would probably save billions in health care costs. The war against death has actually put many, many people at risk of dying horrible, agonizing deaths, deaths so miserable that in the last 20 years a whole debate has emerged in our society about euthanasia and about assisted suicide. So to be able to live long lives and to face lethal diseases like cancer also poses a huge issue for us in terms of how we deal with dying and death.

9:20

Mr. Speaker, Bill 1 is a step in the right direction because it shifts the attention from a narrow focus on finding a cure and combatting death to preventions and screening, where quality of life and lifestyle issues can be raised. That's why I would support this bill. But it does not go far enough. We need another bill, the Alberta palliative care act, in which we set aside \$500 million for end-of-life care because that is surely a direction that we need for the future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to have the opportunity to speak to Bill 1 this evening. There's no doubt that Bill 1, the Alberta Cancer Prevention Legacy Act, demonstrates the vision of the government, and I commend the hon. Premier for sponsoring it. This piece of legislation embodies the dream of all Albertans, that one day we will live in a society that is free from the pain and suffering of cancer.

I would also commend the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview for his amendment and the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere for her clarifying subamendment. The amendment seeks to eliminate the investment of the Alberta cancer prevention legacy fund into ventures that are involved in the tobacco industry. As we're all aware, tobacco use is the largest preventable cause of

cancer. It would be inconsistent with the objects of the act, one of the most important of which is to reduce the incidence of cancer, to have the fund provide capital to corporations which produce known addictive, carcinogenic products.

The Alberta cancer legacy fund established by Bill 1 will support new cancer screening programs as early detection is one of the keys to winning the battle against the disease. Co-operation is another key to success in the treatment and prevention of cancer. The fund will assist in the co-ordination and collaboration between research programs, between the public and the private sector, and between Alberta and other provincial, national, and international researchers. It will help us to get the best value for every dollar invested in cancer research.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta is the best place in Canada to live, and with our efforts to create legislation such as Bill 1, there is no doubt that it will continue as such for generations to come.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) kicks in. Any questions or comments?

There being none, the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 1, the Alberta Cancer Prevention Legacy Act. I, too, want to commend the promoters of this innovative investment. Not common that we see this kind of investment in prevention, and indeed very welcome. Screening, early detection, education, research: all of these are critical to moving forward on this devastating disease for which in many cases we have no cure and we don't have a prevention yet because we don't know the cause. But in those cases where we do know the cause – for example, air pollution and tobacco smoke – we should be doing everything possible.

Many of us are concerned that, indeed, the rates of cancer are increasing, and it's not purely a function of age. It seems to be increasing environmental exposures. Increasingly the wrong foods, alcohol itself, in high doses are associated with cancer. Certainly, we could do more in the area of tobacco and air quality in buildings, especially for employees and workers, as we debated in this House with the last bill on smoke-free places. It's our hope that we will take the next step and ban smoking in all public places, not just those where children are, because lungs are lungs whether they're children's lungs or adults' lungs.

It's also clear in the literature that we know something about dietary carcinogens. Preservatives in some cases seem to be associated with an increased rate of cancer. Hormones seem to be related to cancer, and their use in animal production needs to be looked at very carefully because we know something about how that's translated not only into an increased risk of cancer but also feminization of animal species and, perhaps, some precocious puberty in young people. Obesity itself seems to be a risk factor for cancer. Active living and a healthy diet would not only reduce cancer, but it would reduce some of the chronic diseases that we're seeing add significantly to the health care costs. So there's a spectrum of actions that we could be taking and that this fund, I think, could help to promote and educate about that would not only reduce cancer but would reduce a lot of chronic diseases; for example, heart disease and arthritis and obesity.

There are a few contradictions, though, in spending \$500 million in prevention and not addressing some of the thousands of synthetic chemicals that we introduce into our diets, into our air, into our land every day. We do need to look at how we can pull ourselves off the chemical society that we've become and recognize, I think, that some of the increase, especially in hormone-related cancers like breast and prostate, may well be related to what we are doing to

animals in food production and what we are strewing on the land and putting out of our smokestacks, especially our internal combustion engines, and the increasing focus of this government on fossil fuel development over the next few years. We have to do it better. We have to do it more cleanly. We have to make the shift towards renewable fuels and away from fossil fuels in order to reduce in another way the incidence of cancer.

Some of the synthetic chemicals – and I'm thinking here of both fertilizers and pesticides – from the fossil fuel industry are also adding to the potential carcinogens in our environment. We have to find some other ways, some more natural ways of producing food and minimizing the risks of cancer.

Those are my comments, Mr. Speaker. A very positive direction with investing in prevention, early intervention, research, and education but a contradiction in terms of our heavy emphasis on fossil fuels in this province. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a). Any questions or comments?

Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 1 read a third time]

Bill 3 Protection Against Family Violence Amendment Act, 2006

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

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise and move Bill 3, the Protection Against Family Violence Amendment Act, 2006, for third reading.

I've been encouraged by the support of my colleagues for this bill, and I appreciate the lively discussions we've had about these important amendments. They will give us an improved means of protecting vulnerable people like seniors or those with disabilities and those at risk of family violence through stalking.

I would ask the entire Assembly to lend their support to these amendments and help keep our communities safe from family violence. Thank you.

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

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak on Bill 3 in third reading and to make some comments on the effect of this bill, the Protection Against Family Violence Amendment Act, 2006. Of course, we all agree that the topic of family violence is one of the most important issues in our ongoing struggle to prevent violence in our society. It is really shocking and unacceptable that Alberta, one of the wealthiest provinces in Canada, should also have the highest rate of spousal abuse in Canada. In 2004 a total of 5,520 spousal abuse incidents were reported to the police in Alberta and 3,865 charges were laid. According to Statistics Canada, Alberta women experience the highest rates of domestic violence in the country. Granted, there are many strains on families these days, with being uprooted because of working away from the family, and there are high amounts of gambling problems and alcoholism and a very high divorce rate in this province. Still, there's no excuse. We must encourage and enforce in Alberta a zero tolerance policy for family violence.

I support fully the well-written statements of the preamble of this

bill outlining different aspects of the commitment to oppose family violence and protect especially its victims. The effect of this bill will be, I believe, to strengthen our society's ability to respond to family violence.

9:30

I want to make a few comments: first, about the definition of family violence and, second, about the process of apprehension of offenders. I want to commend the government, especially the Department of Justice, for the publication of a very fine handbook called the Domestic Violence Handbook. Many speakers have already congratulated Valerie Campbell for her work in educating prosecutors and police officers with respect to family violence, and I, too, wish to add my congratulations. She's just doing a splendid job throughout Alberta.

This handbook, Domestic Violence Handbook, is a splendid, clearly written, helpful handbook which raises awareness and outlines the processes of dealing with offenders. As noted in the introduction of this handbook, we've come a long way since July 8, 1982, when the House of Commons introduced a motion on police charging those accused of wife-beating, a motion which was greeted initially with laughter and jeers. We've come a long way since 1982.

Valerie Campbell writes in the handbook that in the first few months of prosecuting cases of domestic violence here in Edmonton, she watched "in helpless disbelief as most victims, often with children in tow, left the courtroom only to return to abusive . . . situations." She also mentioned seeing frustrated and angry police officers leaving the courtroom because a "domestic violence charge was either stayed or dismissed for lack of evidence." So much progress has been made, and three years after the domestic violence unit began in Edmonton, there are now six designated prosecutors and three specialized courtrooms. Victims receive more support, and fewer cases are falling through the cracks.

It is important for the public to be aware of the nature of family violence, and this bill contributes to a wider understanding of such violence. As many reports and studies have indicated, typical abusive relationships occur when one partner exerts control over and exploits the other partner. Such behaviour may involve physical violence or threats of violence or constant denigration of the other partner; in other words, emotional and psychological abuse. It may involve economic means whereby a partner is isolated and made to depend completely on an abusive partner.

Now, this bill adds stalking to the definition of domestic violence. Stalking, or criminal harassment as it has been called, has been a crime in Canada since 1993. Stalking is simply an extension of control as the abuser tries to dominate, follow the victim, watching and threatening the victim, causing tremendous fear. The Domestic Violence Handbook states that

despite its purpose and the best intentions of police and prosecutors, criminal harassment or stalking continues to be overlooked in many domestic violence cases. This oversight can have tragic consequences, particularly for victims who have left abusive relationships.

Hopefully, the inclusion of stalking in this bill will contribute to correcting such an oversight.

Mr. Speaker, that was my first main comment about this bill, about the definition of family violence. Now, the second main comment I want to make is about the process of apprehension. The October 31, 2003, report, A Coherent and Principled Response to Family Violence in Alberta: Recommendations for Action and Change, submitted to the Minister of Children's Services, recommended changes concerning the emergency protection orders, or EPOs. Up until now a justice of the peace or a judge would only

grant an EPO when two requirements were fulfilled: family violence has occurred, and by reason of the seriousness or urgency the order should be granted to protect the claimant. The report recommended broadening these requirements.

For an example, an abuser may be in custody or just released and is on the way to where the victim resides. So the addition in this bill after the words “that family violence has occurred” of the statement “that the claimant has reason to believe that the respondent will continue or resume carrying out family violence” is a good addition. Abusers may not like this, but society needs to protect victims of family violence, and this should outweigh any inconvenience to respondents. So I think that’s an improvement in this bill.

The 2003 report, which I referred to, also raises the issue of sanctions for breaches of an emergency protection order. Bill 3 is fine, but if there are problems in the processing and the enforcement of EPOs, then we still have work to do. Under section 127 of the Criminal Code a police officer can arrest a person for breaching an order by the court, which is of course important for serious cases, and the police act on that, but in many cases involving domestic violence breaches of emergency protection orders are often considered not serious enough for arrest, and there’s a problem there. This is a very serious problem.

Even under section 495 of the Criminal Code a police officer has the power of arrest without warrant for an indictable offence if the officer has reasonable and probable grounds for believing that an offence has occurred. But Bill 3 underlines the importance of dealing with a person who is thought to be about to resume a practice of family violence, not that such an abuse has happened. If such a person is moving toward the home of a victim and is found to be in a place he should not be, he should be charged with a breach of an EPO.

The Protection Against Family Violence Act does not prescribe any penalty for the breach of an EPO. That’s my understanding. The 2003 report recommends that a breach of an EPO should be made a provincial offence so that lesser punishments can be imposed for lesser breaches, and this is especially important now that we’re using special constables and peace officers instead of police officers. Will the special constables – and we don’t know this because we haven’t dealt with Bill 16 yet – be able to deal with offenders who breach EPOs? Bill 3 does not deal with these issues, but, Mr. Speaker, this is addressing its effect. I think this bill will be limited in its effect if we do not also go on to deal with the effectiveness of enforcement.

Those are my comments, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It’s my pleasure to stand and speak to Bill 3, the Protection Against Family Violence Amendment Act, 2006. I think I join most of the other members on this side with positive comments about the amendments being made: section 4, incorporating stalking into the current legislation and defining stalking; section 5, changing the processes used in issuing emergency protection orders, including the vulnerability of elderly people and children, again an important addition; and section 6, requiring only one parent to consent to a child receiving counselling due to family violence.

On a more general basis, I think it’s important to begin to discuss and look at why Alberta has a higher rate of family violence and look at some of the unique features of our culture that contribute to it. Indeed, as has already been alluded to, we need to consider some of the extra strains and stresses on First Nations people and on new

Canadians, some of the living conditions that they are faced with, and how we could reduce some of the primary causes that lead to family violence and despair. Some people are living close to the edge and need the support of a living income, and I include many of our people on welfare and on AISH supports as living well below the poverty line and experiencing on some levels extreme stress that contributes to relationship problems and contributes to violence. I think we need to look at areas in which we could be more conscientious about early intervention in situations that are potentially at risk and with children who are potentially at risk in poverty situations and deprived emotional climates.

Finally, we need to look at areas where we’re not providing the kind of opportunities for growth and development, educational opportunities and training that would also help people of both genders and all races and all walks of life and all ages to maximize their human potential, another area where frustration and anger and bitterness can arise and contribute to an Alberta disadvantage, Mr. Speaker, that I know we would all want to try to address.

9:40

I also want to just talk briefly about the recognition in my own profession, in medicine and nursing, that we need, I think, better training to identify and respond to signs of domestic abuse and violence. I don’t think we’re doing as good a job as we could in our hospitals, clinics and in nursing assessments, medical assessments. I think there’s a real reluctance in some quarters to identify and report and act on domestic violence, and there’s too commonly a willingness to blame the victim in domestic violence – and that needs to be addressed – in terms of attitudes, whether it’s in the health sector, the legal sector, or the policing sector. It may be associated with racism. It may be associated with lack of professional experience. It may be associated with just fear of getting involved in a situation that’s often uncomfortable and leads to a lot of time and counselling, in courtrooms, in interventions of various kinds. So training and preparation of all of our society for dealing straightforwardly with signs of domestic violence is an important contribution that we would like to see in this province to reduce the incidence that has become singularly high in Alberta.

I could allude also to the gun registry and the gun licensing system in Canada, that I believe has made a contribution to reducing some of the injuries, accidents, and violence associated with guns and firearms, long arms particularly. There’s been a significant reduction over the last decade in both injuries and homicides in conjunction with the new national legislation. It’s impossible to say that it’s cause and effect, of course, but there is an association with this legislation and the dropping in gun-related deaths and injuries.

So, on balance, looking at prevention, looking at early intervention, and, finally, at the level of salvage operations in families where the violence has gone beyond it, I think this goes some distance in helping us address this very important issue in creating a healthier society.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a). Any questions or comments?

Any other speakers?

The hon. Member for Red Deer-North to close debate.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to thank all the speakers for their comments on Bill 3, the Protection Against Family Violence Amendment Act, 2006. It’s obvious that we all recognize the need to reduce the incidence of family violence and that we believe that family violence is the root of many societal

dysfunctions. Together I think we can make a difference, and I just want to thank everybody in advance for supporting this important legislation.

[Motion carried; Bill 3 read a third time]

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

Bill 10
Engineering, Geological and Geophysical
Professions Amendment Act, 2006

[Adjourned debate March 9: Mr. Danyluk]

Mr. Danyluk: If there are no other members wishing to talk, I would like to ask for the question.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, you have to move second reading.

Mr. Danyluk: No. What happened is that I am sure that I moved second reading when I did my introduction before, Mr. Speaker, so I'm not sure if I have to do it again.

The Acting Speaker: No, you don't.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise on Bill 10, which on the face of it may seem like something innocuous and not a very detailed bill, but sometimes when the government looks to try and deal with some things that are dealing with some very important groups in our society – I think that in this particular situation, they maybe tried to exercise the wisdom of Solomon and, in doing so, cut the baby in half. You know, it's kind of hard to deal with this particular bill in second reading because I understand from first reading that we're going to get an amendment, which will actually give us the meat of part of what is actually happening here. That will come in Committee of the Whole, which makes it kind of bizarre trying to debate.

On the face of it this bill has some great concerns, to be truthful, for members of ASET, which is the association of science and engineering technology professionals. It's also a matter of some concern to many members of APEGGA, which is the Association of Professional Engineers, Geologists and Geophysicists of Alberta. Any legislation that affects the operation of the engineering and engineering technologist professions is of major concern to many industrial concerns in our province: many construction companies and owners and, indeed, many major interests in Alberta. The people who work in these professional capacities have a huge and significant effect on the economy of Alberta. APEGGA has 43,000 members in Alberta, and ASET has many thousands as well, over 16,000 members.

Now, the context of this legislation is rather important. Engineers and engineering technologists work to design, build, organize, indeed, to engineer many of the projects undertaken in Alberta. We have a huge number, actually, on the books right now in Alberta. We've had a huge number on the books for the last 30 years. We've always had tens of billions of dollars in projects, but actually some of them are being acted on right now. It is important to all Albertans that any work performed in the engineering field is done professionally and with the greatest competence possible. We don't want any more roofs of schools falling down, and we certainly don't want our plants and petrochemical facilities blowing up. Engineers and

engineering technologists are very important. Both the representatives and the executive of members of APEGGA and ASET take their professional duties very seriously. They also understand clearly the importance of legislation governing how their work is performed.

To clarify their concerns regarding professional practices and the regulation of their work, ASET has established standards and has long asked for legislation to govern their work. APEGGA has for many years represented the professional and other interests for professional engineers, and the engineering profession has long been regulated by the Engineering, Geological and Geophysical Professions Act. Many engineers are strong in their feeling that their profession of engineering should be protected even more.

There are many issues surrounding the growth of the engineering profession in our very busy economy. It's extremely busy in the oilfield and construction sectors. It will continue to be so. There are issues like outsourcing engineering services, and that has raised questions of how much engineers tasked with approving work done overseas and sent here online can do and, you know, how far they should go in approving such work and how quickly they should approve such work. What proportion and what degree of vetting of this work should be the responsibility of P.Engs as a sign-off and okay? How much more should we be looking to have the work done here by Alberta engineers and, perhaps, technologists?

Also, there's the integration of the labour market for engineers in the Pacific Northwest, that has allowed for much greater movement of engineers between Alberta and the northwestern United States. Actually, I think the government's Human Resources and Employment department has done some very good work in this area to integrate this labour market for professional engineers, but here again when we deal with legislation, we get into some complicated areas on how this does affect our professions.

9:50

Significantly, in this bill there's always going to be a certain difficulty in finding out where the dividing line is, and this has been the true significance of what's been going on for quite some time between ASET and APEGGA. Where is the dividing line, or should we be looking at something else, between engineering technologists and professional engineers, who have the iron ring and the designation of P.Eng? Where is the demarcation, and how do you determine it? ASET has asked for some time for its own legislation, for its own regulations. APEGGA has been reserved about this because it may affect their professional status. APEGGA has offered to essentially absorb ASET in the past, and the membership of ASET totally rejected that. It creates difficulties.

The government in this bill has the official agreement of both organizations, the executives of both ASET and APEGGA. On the face of it this may look like it reflects unanimity and agreement by the membership of the affected organizations, but in reality this is far from the truth. APEGGA counsels reluctantly agreed with parts of the bill, but they did not actually see the final bill before it happened. It would have been nice to have seen some of the government MLAs at the APEGGA MLA day, but there were none there. To be truthful, some of them were quite surprised at seeing some parts of the bill that were there that will now be taken out by amendment. Now, I understand, we will see these amendments coming forward. To my understanding from talking to a number of the actual ASET membership, even though the executive is supporting the legislation, many of the members have hope for much different legislation. They are prepared to support the changes because they at least see it as a step forward.

I think the government has not dealt itself proudly in how it has

pulled this together, and as this situation in the development of the engineering profession and the P.Engs and technologists develops, I think that we are going to have to look at spending a bit more time in trying to come up with some better ways to have the legislation developed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul, now it's your time to close debate.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to close debate. As the hon. member suggested, yes, there is an amendment that is coming, and we can discuss that at

length when we go into Committee of the Whole. Yes, I would very much like to close debate.

[Motion carried; Bill 10 read a second time]

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

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It has been a very productive day and a very productive evening. On that basis, I would move that we now adjourn until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; at 9:55 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]