



Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday, May 4, 2009

Issue 34

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, May 4, 2009

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Welcome.

Let us pray. At the beginning of this week we ask for renewed strength in the awareness of our duty and privilege as members of the Legislature. We ask for the protection of this Assembly and also the province we are elected to serve. Amen.

Hon. members and ladies and gentlemen, we'll now be led in the singing of our national anthem by Mr. Paul Lorieau. I would invite all to participate in the language of one's choice.

Hon. Members:

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

Introduction of Guests

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

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's great today to introduce to you and through you a group of energetic students from the Darwell school in Whitecourt-St. Anne. They're joined today by Michael Warner and Darla Topping. At this time I'd ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Liepert: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me today to be able to introduce through you to members of this Assembly representatives of the Professional Association of Residents of Alberta. I know I'm probably going to get in trouble with you by saying this, but I'm going to say it anyway: these are the future Dr. Shermans of Alberta. I would ask that they stand as I introduce them. First, we have Dr. Matt McIsaac, Dr. Jillian Schwartz, and Dr. Diana Hong, who are representing the field of family medicine. From internal medicine are Dr. Seema Patel and Dr. Angeli Chopra. Representing plastic surgery are Dr. Peter Kwan and Dr. Adil Ladak. I would welcome as well Dr. Brock Debenham from radiation oncology, Dr. Riley Boyle from anaesthesia, Dr. Elsa Fiedrich from pediatrics, and Dr. Kenman Gan from ophthalmology. I would ask all of our guests to please stand and would ask members to give them the traditional welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness is in trouble with me, but I take consolation in knowing that I'm not the only one.

The hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. I'm very honoured to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly an exceptional group of Albertans, the Red Deer 18th Morrisroe Scout troop. They spent

some time with the Minister of Municipal Affairs this morning, and he said that they're very articulate, intelligent, and committed. They're from Red Deer, Mr. Speaker.

This week, as you might know, is Emergency Preparedness Week, and this Scout troop is one of the first troops in Alberta to earn their emergency preparedness badge. In order to earn this badge, one must be trained in CPR, know how to use a defibrillator, and know how to prepare a 72-hour emergency kit. They've also been asked to provide first aid service during the upcoming Olympic torch relay. Congratulations. I'm very proud of them. Joining us in the members' gallery are Derrick Richards, the group commissioner and troop counsellor; Susan Scott, vice-chair and troop counsellor; Bruce Schollie, the Akela, which is the pack leader; Cody Richards, Scout patrol leader; Monica Scott, Scout patrol leader; John Scott, a Scout; and Evan Schollie, also a Cub Scout. As you can see, Mr. Speaker, Scouting is a family affair. They're now standing in the members' gallery. I'd ask them to receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a very special guest, Mr. Bradley Bostock. He is executive director of Child Find Alberta. Mr. Bostock is seated in the members' gallery and joins us today to kick off the Green Ribbon of Hope Campaign. The campaign runs through the month of May to build awareness regarding the issue of missing children and to educate about ways to safeguard children from predators. I'd like to ask our guest to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me today to rise and introduce to you and through you eight members of the Youth Advisory Panel and their chaperone. These eight youths are from all across the province, as far north as Gift Lake and as far south as Claresholm. The Youth Advisory Panel plays a critical role in providing the Youth Secretariat, of which I'm proud to be the chair, with a youth perspective in helping identify important issues for youth in Alberta. They're all in Edmonton volunteering for the Speak Out conference, which is an opportunity for Alberta's youth to share their experiences and ideas about education. The individuals are Brittany Ashley, Zaheed Damani, Cassie Flett, John Hampson, Fardoussa Omar, Brandon Stewart, Amy Yaremicio, Jesse Peever, and Jena Bober. They are seated in the members' gallery. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise today to introduce four guests from Red Deer regional hospital. They are Dr. Danga Sileikiene, Jennifer Hovila, Janice Kuefler, and Derek Harwood. They're concerned about the proposed centralization and privatization of gynecological cytology laboratory services, that directly affects the laboratories in Red Deer, Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, and University of Alberta hospitals. Today they are here to witness the presentation of a petition which was signed by many engaged citizens in their community and from regions around the province. I would now ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you today to the members of this Assembly my constituent and friend Mr. Jan Buterman and his partner, who really wishes she was a constituent but who for the moment will have to be happy living in Germany, Ms Nicole Koegel. Jan truly lives on the front lines of my constituency and is a champion for the Spruce Avenue community. Indeed, from Mr. Buterman's house you can see three other constituencies, which makes me all that much prouder that he chose to live in Edmonton-Calder. I would ask them to stand and receive the traditional warm greeting of the Assembly. Thank you.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

H1N1 Virus in Central Alberta Pig Herd

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to underscore the importance of relying on fact, not fear, in the midst of the H1N1 influenza outbreak. Over the weekend it was announced that a pig herd in central Alberta had contracted the illness from a farm worker who had recently returned from Mexico. As a result some countries are now unnecessarily restricting imports of pig and pork products. In fact, both the World Health Organization and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations agree that flu viruses do not affect the safety of pork and warned against imposing trade restrictions. The pigs, the family that lives on the farm, and the farm worker have recovered or are recovering.

1:40

I'd like to stress that there is no threat to our food supply. Pork and pork products are still safe to eat when handled properly and prepared properly, as always. You cannot catch the virus by consuming pork products.

I'd also like to commend the farmer who owns the pig herd. Due to the diligence of the farmer, his veterinarian, and the government's immediate response, precautionary measures were put in place to minimize the risk of the influenza spreading to other swine and people. The farm was quarantined, and no other farms are reporting herds with flu symptoms.

Agriculture and Rural Development has been working closely with industry and the federal government since the outbreak in people was reported, urging producers to be vigilant in their biosecurity measures, to restrict people from visiting their barns, especially if they've been to areas affected by the virus, and to report any suspected cases. Agriculture and Rural Development will continue to work with its counterparts to ensure that producers are vigilant in maintaining their biosecurity practices and support the efforts of the federal government to get borders reopened to Alberta pork.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

National Emergency Preparedness Week

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. May 3 to 9 is National Emergency Preparedness Week, as noted earlier by the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. Emergency Preparedness Week is a collaborative, province-wide effort that educates Albertans about their role in preparing for emergencies and disasters

as well as encourages communities to work together during a crisis. Safety is everybody's responsibility. Planning and preparing for emergencies can significantly reduce the impact of an emergency or disaster and help Albertans recover more quickly.

We should all be prepared to address our basic needs for at least the first 72 hours of an emergency. Mr. Speaker, there are three simple steps that will better prepare Albertans to face a range of emergencies. The first is to know and assess the risks in your community or region. The second is to make a plan that will help you and your family know what to do. The third is to prepare an emergency kit that includes water, nonperishable food, a flashlight, extra batteries, candles, matches, and a first aid kit.

Partnerships are essential to providing the foundation that builds safe and strong communities in Alberta. The government of Alberta through the Alberta Emergency Management Agency is committed to helping individuals and families become better prepared to face a wide range of emergencies any time, anywhere. By working together with municipalities, First Nations, emergency services, volunteer organizations, the media, and individuals, we can help ensure the safety of Albertans when disasters threaten our communities.

I encourage all Albertans to take a few moments to learn how they can keep themselves and their families safe. Being prepared is not reserved to one week out of the year but is a year-round activity. Are you prepared? You can check out our website at www.aema.alberta.ca or my Twitter site at JonoMLA.

Thank you.

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

Public Education Parable

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The class of '44, a public education parable. Welcome back, grade 6ers, to day two of your graduating class of '44. We had a very eventful first day back at school yesterday. As you recall, we had just begun the genesis of our discussion of ancient civilizations when the fire bell rang, causing our mass exodus from the school. Once outside, Caretaker Leviticus called out the names and numbers until Principal Deuteronomy and Vice-principal Joshua judged that it was safe for us to return. Ruth led the way back into the school while twins First and Second Samuel held the outside doors, and the First and Second members of the Kings family monitored the inside doors.

Once back in the classroom we reviewed the drill carefully, chronicling what had gone right and wrong. Ezra and Nehemiah remarked how calmly, regally Esther had led the way while Job patiently followed behind. David, the proverbial optimist, noted that he wasn't afraid because he knew the drill. His ecclesiastical enthusiasm prompted Solomon to wisely remark that, in his opinion, our first fire drill was a real success. Isaiah and Jeremiah lamented that they thought it was their turn to hold the doors. Ezekiel and Daniel praised Hosea for his quick response in alerting the fire department. Amos and Obadiah had very little to add to the discussion. Jonah wailed that Micah, Nahum, and Zechariah had been talking instead of exiting the school quickly and quietly. However, none of his classmates swallowed his story. In conclusion, Malachi prophesied that tomorrow would be a new day and that if we didn't do better in the future, we might suffer the consequences.

Students, please now open your history books to chapter 1, ancient Greek gods and goddesses.

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

National Hospice Palliative Care Week

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This week is National Hospice Palliative Care Week in Canada. This one-week campaign not only focuses on raising awareness of hospice palliative care but is also a week to celebrate, recognize, and share the achievements of hospice palliative care and its care providers.

Hospice palliative care is a type of health care that aids in relieving suffering and improving the quality for those living and dying. Hospice palliative care provides care to patients and their families living with or at risk of developing a life-threatening illness, regardless of diagnosis, prognosis, or age. Palliative health care providers help patients prepare for and manage the dying process by addressing the needs, hopes, and fears of patients and their families, Mr. Speaker, as well as helping Albertans cope with loss and grief during illness and after death during the bereavement period. These services could not be provided without the support of the Canadian Hospice Palliative Support Association and their belief that all Albertans should have access to quality end-of-life care.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to take this opportunity to thank all those involved in National Hospice Palliative Care Week and to help celebrate, recognize, and share in the achievements of the hospice palliative care and all its health professionals.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Green Ribbon of Hope Campaign

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today many members of this House are wearing green ribbons, like this one, to commemorate Child Find Alberta's Green Ribbon of Hope campaign. This campaign was started 18 years ago in response to the abduction and murder of Ontario student Kirsten French. It raises awareness about the issue of missing and abducted children. The ribbon symbolizes the hope for the safe return of these children to their families.

Mr. Speaker, this is an issue that affects people across our country. In 2007 over 60,000 children were reported missing. Thanks to Child Find Alberta people in our province faced with this horrifying ordeal have somewhere to turn for help. These dedicated volunteers spend countless hours educating adults and children on how to prevent abductions and work hand in hand with law enforcement and other agencies to locate missing children. I commend their dedication to keeping children and youth from being victims of abduction, abuse, exploitation, and trafficking and providing strength and support to parents during a most trying time in their life.

This green ribbon is a symbol of hope to the families of missing and abducted children across our nation. Mr. Speaker, I invite all members of the Legislative Assembly to wear this green ribbon and draw awareness to this very important issue.

Thank you.

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

Online Campground Reservations

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Friday the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation in partnership with the Minister of Service Alberta launched Alberta's new online campground reservation service. The sheer volume online and over the phone shows that Albertans want this service. There were more than 145,000 hits to the website in the first few hours, and the call centre has handled thousands of phone calls.

Mr. Speaker, more than 10,000 campsites have been reserved online or through the Service Alberta call centre so far. It is

interesting also that on our opening day 23 per cent of the website hits were international, from the United States, France, and Switzerland. Despite the high volumes I'm told there are some spots available for this long weekend at Cypress Hills provincial park and other locations.

The new online service makes it easier for Albertans and visitors to make reservations in 25 popular provincial campgrounds. I know my constituents are pleased that two Bonnyville area campgrounds are included in the service this year: Moose Lake provincial park and Franchere Bay provincial recreation area, both great places to camp.

I understand there were some glitches, as you would expect with any new service. This is being monitored closely, and adjustments are being made where necessary.

Mr. Speaker, the government's investment in the SuperNet made it possible to take the Internet out to remote campground locations. I encourage all Albertans to use this service and to explore Alberta's beautiful campgrounds this summer.

Thank you.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Parental Choice in Education

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The proposed changes to the human rights act are an embarrassment. They show this government to be out of touch with Albertans and the modern world. The Alberta Teachers' Association has clearly stated that they do not support the move. The Sheldon Chumir foundation similarly has stated that it's against this bill. To the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit: why did the minister not listen to these groups in drafting the legislation?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, sometimes you have to make tough choices. There were lots of recommendations that were made to our department on this proposed legislation: some that we agreed with, some that we didn't agree with, some that I brought to our caucus and we supported, and some that we decided we would not.

I remember the day the Sheldon Chumir foundation released their report, and I spoke in response to it. The Leader of the Opposition at that time said that he would work with us to make this bill a successful one. There were things that we all agreed on that we should have. The inclusion of sexual orientation into this particular legislation was one that we agreed on and others.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Why did the minister let the right wing of his caucus prevail over his own knowledge and experience and the understanding of experts in this area?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's funny enough: the right wing of this caucus. Our caucus has had full, vigorous debate on this particular issue. The Sheldon Chumir foundation wanted us to take out publications and statements, and that, you know, from an organization I wouldn't deem to be right wing. But our caucus thought we wanted to make sure that we protected the rights and responsibilities of those visible minorities and those people that are new immigrants to this province. We can't agree with everything, and we shouldn't expect that the opposition would understand that.

Dr. Swann: Well, does this minister understand that the lack of consultation and thought on this policy has resulted in a bad bill that

will lead to children being excluded from public schools on important issues like evolution, women's rights as well as trivial issues like what the Flat Earth Society might be promoting, compromising our public education system?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, I love to read fiction. I like to engage in it. But I would expect the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition would be able to read the bill, which clearly states: "subject-matter that deals explicitly with religion, sexuality or sexual orientation." Evolution is not explicitly religious. We're talking about the actual religion if you're talking about Catholicism, for instance, or Muslim. We're not talking about religious beliefs. We are not talking about religious content. In our school system in our curriculum as it stands today, there is very little in the way of a religious nature with respect to the subject matter.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. According to the Sheldon Chumir foundation the parental opt-out clause in the proposed human rights legislation is a "slippery slope to administrative and legal chaos." Teachers must have the freedom to teach our children how to think critically and with an open mind without fear of the consequences of archaic laws being forced upon them by the government. To the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit: will the minister confirm that section 11.1 of the proposed human rights legislation can be used to launch a human rights complaint against a teacher, principal, or school board?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, what is clear is that if a teacher follows the curriculum, which has very little that is of a contentious nature, and if the school board, as they have to do now under the School Act, notifies a parent of those contentious issues with respect to religion, sexuality, or sexual orientation, they have nothing to worry about.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: what consequences has the minister identified regarding a chill effect for teachers who will now avoid spontaneous discussion or teaching opportunities for fear they might run afoul of various student opt-out instructions?

Mr. Blackett: Well, thankfully, most of our teachers, Mr. Speaker, in this province are reasonable people. Parents are reasonable people. We do not determine what the discussion in a classroom is. The Minister of Education and the school board determine what the curriculum is. We cannot control nor is our intent to control any discussion that arises in a classroom. That is for the teacher to lead, and there is nothing here in this legislation that deters them from doing their job.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. To the same minister: how do those outside of Alberta determine a standard of education to assess Alberta students when a student can opt out of any class or teaching module in math, biology, history, social studies, or whatever when their parents object on religious grounds? [interjections] It's factual.

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, hopefully those people outside of the province won't be listening to the Member for Edmonton-Centre.

I'll tell you this: if they read the legislation, "subject-matter that deals explicitly with religion, sexuality or sexual orientation," I don't know where math fits into that. I don't know where English fits into that. I don't know where social studies fits into most of that. I don't know what school you went to, but the one I went to never had to deal with that subject matter.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While Bill 44 fails to differentiate between faith-based objections of conscience and opportunistic avoidance convenience, it expects classroom teachers to be able to do so. Parental rights devoid of parental responsibility are not simply unsound but unjust. If a parent considers a portion of Alberta's approved public curriculum objectionable, then the onus should be placed on the parent to seek out the publicly subsidized alternatives currently available, whether through home-, charter, or private schooling. To the minister: given that hours of instruction and preparation are contractually predetermined, where and how are objecting students going to be accommodated?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, in the same way that they're accommodated now. Under our current School Act and our mandated policies if parents object to religious instruction or instruction with respect to human sexuality, they are entitled to ask that their child be opted out of the class, either within the class or in another setting in the school, to take an alternate program at that time. It's the policy now. It's the policy that will continue.

Mr. Chase: How many additional teachers are you planning to hire to educate faith-based objectors within the universally accessible public system? How will their deployment be determined and their nonoffending curriculum developed?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is taking things to a ludicrous extreme. We currently have in this province an opportunity for parents who object to their child being included in instruction with respect to human sexuality to have those children opt out of that. We also have in the School Act, under section 50, an opportunity for parents to ask that their child be excluded from religious instruction. That's exactly the same process that will be continued. Parents will continue to be notified when those topics are up for discussion, and if they wish, they can exclude their children. It's not a problem now. It won't be a problem in the future.

Mr. Chase: Given that the mandate of public schools is to provide a first-rate education rather than a publicly subsidized sitting service, under what circumstances would a teacher or principal be empowered to call an objectionable parent to come pick up their child? In other words, how far backward are public schools under Bill 44 expected to bend over at the expense of all other children, their parents, and teachers to accommodate the wishes of faith-based objectors, whose rights to legitimate dissent are already covered under our existing School Act?

Mr. Hancock: The only thing objectionable that I found was in the way that question was formulated.

Mr. Speaker, as I've said, in Alberta we have a very strong curriculum. We expect teachers to teach that curriculum. In that curriculum from time to time – for example, in the junior high health program or in the CALM program in high school – there are topics of human sexuality, which have always been issues of concern to

parents about how their children are instructed in those areas. Many parents want to know when that instruction happens, and they want to be able to know either that their child could be excluded from that or included. They're also allowed to talk to their child about values, about caring and loving relationships, and about the things around that. We would encourage parents to be involved in their children's education, to understand what's in the curriculum, and to have the opportunity, where they object, to have their child opt out.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Over the weekend the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit admitted that evolution was science, and he said that his government isn't arguing science. But, you know, despite all of the protestations from the other side about what they're not doing, we need to remember that it was the Premier himself who said that evolution would be optional if parents objected on religious grounds. This isn't a fantasy of the opposition; this comes from the Premier. So I want to ask the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit: have you and the Premier figured out why you're contradicting each other and why the message . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

2:00

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, I know one thing: I don't pretend to speak for the Premier.

What we have here is the legislation. It's clearly stated, and I refer to that. In the legislation that I brought forward: "subject-matter that deals explicitly with religion, sexuality or sexual orientation." If you have a question about what the Premier said, I suggest that you ask the Premier that question.

Mr. Mason: Well, I keep trying, Mr. Speaker.

The minister knows that those things are subject to interpretation. It is the interpretation of what is religion that is at stake here. Will he stand up here and settle this matter once and for all and say that evolution is not considered religious grounds and will not be enforced by this government and make sure that the act is amended to say that?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, I know my English is pretty good, and I did say: "subject-matter that deals . . . with religion." Evolution is not religion. Neither is math. Neither is English. I can't be more clear than that. Ask a court, ask anyone to determine where evolution becomes religion.

Mr. Mason: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Premier's interpretation and his minister's interpretation are clearly very different things. The question is: will you change this act, will you amend it to ensure that there can be no misinterpretation such as we've seen from your Premier, your leader?

Mr. Blackett: Mr. Speaker, as he alluded to last week, we haven't even had debate in second reading on this particular motion. We'll have a lot of chances to discuss it, and we'll see what comes out of that. I tell you what. Speaking of misinformation, I'd love for the opposition members to actually stick to the facts, to what's actually written here, not their flights of fancy and their ideas of fiction.

The Speaker: Of course, the question period is not the place to debate bills – we have ample opportunity for that – nor is it a place to seek legal interpretations, but we all know that, too.

The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

H1N1 Virus in Central Alberta Pig Herd

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the weekend it was announced that the H1N1 flu virus had been discovered in a herd of pigs in Alberta. Unfortunately, a small number of countries are now either banning or restricting the import of pigs and pork products. My question is to the minister of agriculture. Can you provide us with an update on this situation?

Mr. Groeneveld: Mr. Speaker, it's my understanding that the worker and the family who live on the farm have recovered from the flu, but there have been unwarranted trade restrictions imposed. China has banned importing live pigs and pork from Alberta. Both the World Health Organization and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations agree that flu viruses do not affect the safety of pork and warned against imposing trade restrictions. To date there have not been any reports of illness in other pigs. The virus was contained in this one instance.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a livestock farmer myself – and I've raised pigs for many years, many thousands of them – I know that farmers have very strict biosecurity protocols to protect the health of their animals. My second question is for the same minister. Can you explain the biosecurity measures in the livestock industry and explain what they have in place?

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, Mr. Speaker, the pork industry in particular in Alberta has very proactive biosecurity measures in place that are standard procedure. This includes limiting visitors to the barn, using visitor logs, showering before and after entry into the barn, wearing special clothing inside the barn, using closed herds, and sourcing stock from reputable sources. In addition, flu in pigs is a notifiable disease under the Animal Health Act here in Alberta. Any suspected cases must be reported to the chief provincial veterinarian within 24 hours.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. That sounds good to me. I'm going to be sure to put some pork chops or ham steaks on my barbecue this weekend, and I'd encourage all Albertans to do the same.

My final question to the same minister: what traceability measures does Alberta have in place to ensure that this one isolated incident does not spread further?

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, Mr. Speaker, in January we introduced new traceability measures, which included premises identification. It's become significant that we've done this now. Livestock producers were required to register their premises, which includes providing their legal land description, species that are raised there, and the maximum capacity of the operation. In cases like this, information is critical. As soon as we are notified of a possible animal disease like H1N1 in a herd, we are able to check our system and find out immediately what other livestock operations are in the area, what

species of livestock are being raised, and the proximity of livestock to other farms' herds.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition, followed by the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Wait-list Registry

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Lack of answers on wait-list issues in the health system prompt further questions on how this government continues to fail Albertans in establishing the true status of wait-lists in the health care system. Albertans are being denied access to information that would tell them how quickly they can expect to be seen. This government has neglected to update the Alberta wait-list registry since September 2008. To the minister: why is the Alberta wait-list registry more than seven months out of date?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would suggest: let's talk about something that is up to date. I would advise the Leader of the Opposition and all members of the House to go to the Alberta . . .

Mr. Mason: Just answer the question.

Mr. Liepert: I would advise the Leader of the Opposition and maybe the other fellow over there to go to the website of Alberta Health Services because on that website is their strategic plan for the next three years. It talks specifically about wait-lists and asks for public input.

Dr. Swann: Well, that's very good, Mr. Speaker. I'm sure public input is important, but when will the wait-lists, with an accurate picture of people's ability to access the system, be available?

Mr. Liepert: Well, if he'd check the website, Mr. Speaker, there are some specific numbers on there that I'm sure he'd find very interesting.

Dr. Swann: Will the minister comment on how we're going to be reporting the regional differences in access when the regions are gone?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think we're all Albertans, and our objective through Alberta Health Services is to ensure that we provide equitable health care to all Albertans. Now, this particular member and this particular party may want to favour one particular region over the other in this province. We don't do that, and that's the way we're going to proceed.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Spring Flooding

Mr. Jacobs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This year's late heavy snowfall in southwest Alberta has many of my constituents thinking about spring floods. Every year spring storms flood Alberta's many rivers, which are already high due to snowmelt. Every year that rain and runoff flows through Alberta and into Saskatchewan, sending much more water across the border than the 50 per cent we are obligated to send. My first question to the Minister of Environment: what is this government doing to help harness the excess rain and runoff in the spring for productive use in the late summer and fall?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you know, mankind has been trying to harness Mother Nature for thousands of years. I think that we find time and time again that our feeble attempts are sometimes acknowledged as such by Mother Nature and by the environment. That being said, we do have a series of dams, reservoirs throughout the province that we maintain and try to have the level in those dams reflect the risk of flooding that is based upon the snowpack in the mountains, and we're managing them in the same way this spring.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Jacobs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Oldman dam, just north of Pincher Creek, not only captures spring runoff and rain but helps regulate the flow of water during high stream flow, protecting downstream communities from the devastating effects of flooding. The first supplemental to the same minister. The benefits of dams are obvious. When will this government commit to building more?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I wish I could give a very simple and direct answer to that question – it would certainly make my life a lot easier – but unfortunately I can't. The cost related to dams is enormous, and there are consequences. It's undeniable that there are consequences, particularly downstream and to some degree the flooding that results behind the dam. We're constantly looking at opportunities to expand our dam infrastructure in the province, and we're also looking at some very promising opportunities for off-stream storage as well as traditional dams.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Jacobs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental to the same minister. While dams help control spring flow, it still brings the risk of floods. What is the government doing to ensure that Albertans are aware of potential flood situations during the annual flood season?

2:10

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can speak from personal experience that the damage that can be caused by floods is enormous. However, Albertans can rest assured that we continue to do 24/7 monitoring of not only the level of water that's in the rivers but also the snowpack, the rate of melt, and related weather systems that move through. We issue advisories, warnings, and they are not only posted online, but when they're severe enough, we'll intercede and make sure that as many people as possible have advance warning of dangers that may result.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Beef Marketing

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. The check-off for the sale of beef in Alberta is \$3 a head, and currently it's nonrefundable. However, this government is planning to make this check-off refundable without allowing producers to exercise their democratic right to hold a plebiscite on the matter. My question is to the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. Why is the minister not allowing producers to conduct a plebiscite and decide for themselves instead of imposing a decision on them?

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, Mr. Speaker, if just one producer wants to redirect his own money to support an association of his choice, he should have that freedom. It's not up to government to tell business owners what business association they must support with their own money. That gives these business owners the ability to choose for themselves. It certainly does. No matter the outcome, everyone loses in a plebiscite because it will only further divide a group that's already faced with the difficulty of trying to work together.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Well, thanks. I congratulate the minister on reading his notes so well.

My question to him now is: if allowing choice on this matter is so important, why was the minister so heavy handed in making ID mandatory for every beef producer in this province? Why the double standard, Mr. Minister?

Mr. Groeneveld: Mr. Speaker, they're two very separate issues. The age verification is mandatory. We're trying to move beef, particularly, into offshore markets. I've heard out there loud and clear that if you don't do that, you're not going to be here. So we moved ahead, and there was compliance, I believe, of 83 per cent, and I think that probably now we've got the stock in position where we can move ahead with this. Will it give us a market advantage? Stay tuned. We'll see how that goes in the next little bit.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Well, thanks. A pretty convenient double standard, Mr. Speaker.

As this minister knows, from Pollockville to Peace River Alberta's beef producers are angry, and they feel betrayed by this minister and this Premier. Will the minister tell the House which big feedlot operators are calling for this change, or is he afraid of revealing the names of the people who bankrolled this Premier's leadership campaign?

Mr. Groeneveld: Here we go with the innuendo again, Mr. Speaker. Why doesn't he come right out and say what he's thinking? I can guarantee this hon. member that there are a whole lot of people out there that want to have choice. It's not just feeders. There's a whole slug of them, so don't think that a 50-50 plebiscite is going to solve anything.

Domestic Worker Recruitment Fees

Mr. Benito: Mr. Speaker, a number of my constituents have expressed concerns about domestic workers, specifically nannies, being charged fees by recruiting companies. My question is to the Minister of Service Alberta. Are employment recruiting companies allowed to charge fees to domestic workers hoping to seek employment in our province?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government of Alberta wants to ensure that all workers in our province are treated with fairness and respect. Currently there is an exemption in Alberta's regulations that allows for nannies and domestic workers to be charged a fee by recruiting companies. As the Minister of Service Alberta I have the ability to change that exemption. I assure

you all today that I will be removing that exemption as soon as possible.

Mr. Benito: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's certainly good news.

My first supplemental is to the same minister. Is the fee that these agencies are charging domestic workers something new?

Mrs. Klimchuk: Actually, Mr. Speaker, this exemption for domestic workers has been in place for decades, but there is no good reason for it to exist. It is already illegal for an employment agency to charge a fee for helping a person find work in all other Alberta sectors. We will be communicating this change with the employment agencies, and we'll work closely with our counterparts in Employment and Immigration and the federal government to ensure that employees, workers, and the employment agencies are well aware of their rights and obligations.

Mr. Benito: My last supplemental is to the same minister, Mr. Speaker. When will this exemption be removed?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am taking the steps to ensure that the regulation will be amended by June 1, and the change will take effect three months after. I believe this is a change that's necessary in creating further equality in Alberta's labour market. As Minister of Service Alberta I became aware of the situation when I first was appointed last year, and it's time to make sure it gets done.

Caribou Management

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, a recent federal report has noted that half of Canada's boreal caribou herds are in decline and could die off unless their habitat is better protected. To the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development: despite the caribou recovery plan having been in existence for approximately four years, why does the caribou population continue to be in critical danger?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Woodland caribou have been in decline across all of Canada, the provinces and the territories, including Alberta, for the last century. In the recent federal report referenced by the hon. Member for Calgary Buffalo, the data on Alberta, in fact, stood out precisely because we do the best job of all the provinces in actually tracking our caribou, having previous numbers and current numbers because we have a caribou recovery plan.

Mr. Hehr: Well, congratulations on the tracking of the numbers. Given that the province admitted last year that the land northwest of Edmonton and set aside for caribou protection was still subject to significant industrial development, why has greater action not been taken to protect these critical habitats?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, we are taking extensive and innovative actions to protect the habitat and to look after our sustainable caribou population. Again, the opposition likes to make it sound like you do one thing at a time in this province. The fact is that in most of northern Alberta, in addition to wildlife issues, you have forestry issues, oil and gas issues, native issues, and so forth. You have to strike a balance, and that's exactly what we're doing. The success

of our integrated land management plan, which reduces the footprint of industry, and co-operation between forestry and oil and gas exploration has made a significant improvement in protecting caribou habitat.

Mr. Hehr: Well, I like to hear of all these wonderful things. Last week I was asking about the grizzlies, which appear to be in decline. This week I ask about the caribou, that continue to be in decline. Why, with all these efforts, are things continuing to decline? What are we going to do specifically in the interim between now and the land-use framework to protect these populations of animals that remain here?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to report that the Lower Athabasca Regional Advisory Council, which deals with the northeastern part of northern Alberta, will be moving forward on its advice. Part of their agenda, part of their guidance document is to look at new protected areas. I've seen the guidance documents, and I can predict with some confidence that there will be significant new protection for wildlife and forest in the northeast.

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

Parental Choice in Education (continued)

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government's attempt to water down human rights under the guise of curriculum control has created a firestorm of controversy. Once again a lack of foresight has embarrassed our province. It's ridiculous to think that the teaching of evolution would ever be considered a violation of human rights, yet that's exactly what your plan will likely be interpreted to say. My question is to the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit. Why won't you clarify the issue right now and commit to removing any threat to teachers from your proposed changes to our human rights scheme?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, I have to agree with the hon. member that it's ridiculous to believe that evolution as part of our curriculum would be something that would be challenged.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, the School Act does not say that people can remove children from instruction on the equality of people from different races or genders. The minister is finally adding sexual orientation to the code, but, at the same time, he's allowing people to remove children from instruction on the equality of people with different sexual orientation. Does the minister think that parents should have the right to remove children from instruction about the equality of people from different races or genders? If not, why is he treating the GBLT community differently and creating a second tier of human rights in our province?

2:20

Mr. Blackett: Mr. Speaker, the opposition is all over the map, like, you know, the subject matter that deals explicitly with religion. I don't know what half of what she says has to do with this particular piece. We as a caucus, as a government strongly believe in human rights. We believe in family. We believe in a lot of things. We believe that Bill 44, when we get to actually debate it, will show exactly how we have looked at the best interests of Albertans and

each and every group and will represent them to the best of our ability.

Ms Notley: Well, I suspect that the minister had trouble understanding the question because he doesn't understand the issue. Your proposed policy will clearly allow children to be removed from classes which discuss sexual orientation. Presumably, that includes where a teacher instructs that sexual orientation is a protected equality right under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Why is the minister supporting a plan to limit the ability of teachers to talk about our human rights code to our Alberta children?

Mr. Blackett: Mr. Speaker, what we are doing is saying that, you know, the provisions are already given to our parents in the School Act. We will continue to do that. With respect to sexual orientation, they have that provision to opt out now. They will have that provision going forward.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Adult Guardianship and Trusteeship Legislation

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. There are fears among seniors that the Adult Guardianship and Trusteeship Act will allow for their rights to be taken away arbitrarily without their consideration or without the assistance of legal representation. My questions are to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. Could you please inform this House about the real facts?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, I too have heard these misconceptions. I stand before you and all members of this Assembly to assure you that these claims are wrong. In fact, quite the opposite is true. I am more than willing to go on record and say that the Adult Guardianship and Trusteeship Act is good legislation. It provides more choices and more safeguards for Albertans who need help making decisions. The act is designed to respect an Albertan's right to make decisions for as long as possible and maintain their dignity in the process. It's a big improvement over the 30-year-old Dependent Adults Act legislation.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituents have told me that under the new act capacity assessors can enter seniors' homes to make determinations about their mental capacity without their consent. Again to the same minister: can you please explain the safeguards provided to individuals under the AGTA?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, first let me clarify that under the new AGTA adults are presumed capable unless determined otherwise by proper assessments. Any adult can refuse a capacity assessment, in which case the assessor will leave. Also, under the new act if anyone applies to the court to be a private guardian, the adult will be notified and given copies of all the documentation. The adult also has the right to legal representation. Seniors and vulnerable adults are more protected than ever under the new AGTA.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplement to the same minister: since this is new legislation, what are you doing to help our constituents understand it better?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, my ministry staff are currently conducting information sessions on the new AGTA in communities across the province. We've been running local ads to announce these meetings, and a list of all the sessions is posted on my ministry's website. I encourage anyone who has questions about the AGTA to attend one of these sessions or to contact the office of the public guardian.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge East, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Emergency Preparedness

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is Emergency Preparedness Week. Grass and brush fires outside of Edmonton, flood season around the corner, and the threat of H1N1 pandemic have all heightened Albertans' awareness of emergency preparedness. One of the initiatives that appears to have fallen off the public radar is the interdisciplinary institute for emergency preparedness that was part of last year's business plan. My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. In 2008 the minister was committed to establishing the safety, security, and environmental institute. Given that the institute's funding was supposedly in place last year . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, the institute is being worked on. We are having discussions, and the progress is coming forward.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. I'll be just a tad more specific. How much money has been spent, what is the timeline for completion, and has this been budgeted for next year?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, it is in our budget with the Alberta Emergency Management Agency. We hope that our progress this year will bring forward the good work that the agency could do. I would say that it's in our budget year.

Ms Pastoor: Given that the proposed fiscal sustainability act will take away the \$2.5 billion security blanket for disaster recovery, what is the minister's plan B if there are no funds left to deal with forest fires, floods, and other disasters, a very real possibility with this proposed legislation?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, we do not budget for disasters. Disasters are not things that are predicted. Every year we have different disasters, whether they be floods or storms. In 2005 the disasters cost approximately \$165 million; last year it was approximately \$40 million. This government has always supported Albertans in disasters and in emergencies.

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

Emergency Public Warning System

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today the Minister of Municipal Affairs announced that the province is investing in upgrading the emergency public warning system, and I'm pleased that he was able to meet with the Red Deer Morrisroe Scout group and advise them on it. That will certainly assist them in responding to an emergency. Can the minister elaborate and tell Albertans specifically why this is being done?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, Alberta has an outstanding public warning system. It is the first province-wide system of its kind. The system has served Albertans very well, but it is time to look at new technologies so we continue to lead the way. In specifics, we will increase the access to information by expanding our use of technology of satellite television, satellite radio, website alerts, reverse 911, cellphones, social media.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that response. My second question is for the same minister. Can the minister tell us when he thinks this new system with all its new technology will be up and running?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, today is the first day of a process of building for the future. Today we issued a request for proposal, and the plan is to have the system in operation in approximately a year.

Mr. Speaker, during the upgrade of the process I want to assure Albertans that there is not going to be any disruption of the system we have in place. The system that we are bringing forward is going to provide additional access for all Albertans. The emergency public warning system will be there for Albertans for the future.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is for the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. Your ministry is responsible for the Amber Alert. How will changes to the emergency public warning system affect the Amber Alert?

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, the key to an effective Amber Alert program, obviously, is getting accurate information out to the public as soon as possible so that the public can be on the lookout for the child. These improvements that the hon. minister spoke about to the emergency public warning system will enhance the Amber Alert program used by police services in this province in high-risk cases of child abduction. The partnership with police has proven highly successful. Each of the seven Amber Alerts that has been initiated since the start-up in 2002 has concluded with the safe return of the child.

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

2:30 Condominium Property Act Consultation

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The endless monitoring of condo problems by the Minister of Service Alberta is completely ineffective. Condo owners have to choose between difficult legal battles or leaving their homes because this government refuses to protect them. To the Minister of Service Alberta: how does the minister's monitoring do anything to help Albertans who have to leave their homes because they can no longer afford the condo repair bills?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to this situation, as I've indicated before, the Condominium Property Act is one of those acts that is under review and is going to be going through a very thorough review. It's a very complex piece of legislation; therefore, we need to make sure we do it right. I'm very

aware of some of the tragic and unfortunate situations that are happening across Alberta, and that's why being informed of these situations is so important to me.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think that review is taking longer and longer while the crisis is hitting more and more Albertans every day. Since the minister refuses to change the legislation to help condo owners, how else will the minister assist condo owners who are forced to pay tens of thousands of dollars to repair the poor construction of their homes?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to note that I will be meeting with the Alberta Real Estate Association. I know that particular group has some excellent suggestions looking at solutions to some of these issues, whether it's condo fees or the reserve fee or the maintenance issue. We know that condos are aging in Alberta. We also know that with the boom in building there were situations where perhaps places were built that we need to look at and to change to enforce the rules better.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The situation is not improving as the number of legal cases involving condos, repairs, and management companies continue to rise, Minister. How can the minister justify her continued inaction on this issue?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, with respect to the Condominium Property Act, the review that will be going on in this next short while is really, really important. I am very aware of the many legal cases that are before the courts on this matter with respect to individual situations. This affects families. This is families having to move out for whatever reasons. This is why we need to look at this and make sure that those families are protected and to make sure that things like this don't happen again.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Knowledge Infrastructure Program Funding

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's postsecondary students are the future of our knowledge-based economy. Earlier today we got some good news when our government announced the shared funding agreement with the federal government to enhance the infrastructure of Alberta's postsecondary institutions. My first question is to the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. It is nice to receive infrastructure funding, but how does this funding align with the provincial goals and priorities?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, today we did have the pleasure of having two of our federal ministers, Ms Ambrose and Mr. Goodyear, in Edmonton to announce a partnered funding of \$350 million for postsecondaries here in the province of Alberta, of which \$187 million is the provincial contribution to this project, the KIP, or knowledge infrastructure project. The federal contributions are going to enable us to enhance and advance the high-priority capital projects within the science and innovation system across the

province. It's also important to note that these projects are going to support nearly 2,500 new jobs for Albertans in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question to the same minister: how were Alberta's universities and colleges selected for this program? What criteria was it based on?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, Campus Alberta, introduced in this House last year, developed a system of prioritization for Campus Alberta and all through the province based on the need identified through a provincial, pan-Alberta approach. I'm very, very pleased that all of our postsecondaries were online and on stream with what we were doing. The universities and the colleges and the technical institutes all have submitted to us their priority projects and their deferred maintenance and their science and innovation agenda, so we went through that list in consultation with the postsecondaries and came up with those high-priority projects.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question to the same minister. The federal government called this one-time funding. Is this the only announcement we can expect related to this program?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would love to see more announcements from the federal government on dollars coming to Alberta and certainly hope that there are a number of areas where they're going to be making do on some commitments. I think the balance of funding under the knowledge infrastructure program is going to be further announced this fall. The ministers gave us every indication that there is another phase to this project. It's a short-term, two-year program. We have to have shovel-ready projects, but they also have to be projects that in our mind align with the goals and the objectives of Campus Alberta and the science and innovation agenda of Campus Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay.

H1N1 Virus in Central Alberta Pig Herd

(continued)

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. China, Ukraine, and South Korea have all banned Alberta pork as a result of the spreading H1N1 influenza. Alberta pigs, as I think we all know in this Assembly, have tested positive, but we also all know it has to be stressed that the influenza cannot be transferred to humans from the consumption of pork and that Alberta pork is safe to eat. My first question is to the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. How is this minister working with Alberta pork producers to co-ordinate efforts and ensure that Alberta's pork exports are not further hurt by misconceptions about the H1N1 influenza?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It certainly is a good question because it sure is an issue for our pork producers out there today. I can guarantee the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview that from the very moment that swine flu was announced, we worked with the pork people on contacting all the producers, making sure their biosecurity was up to speed. I don't think we had

to do that. I think they were there ahead of us. But it certainly is an issue, and we continue to work with them as we move through this.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Thanks. Again to the same minister: does this minister recognize that in situations such as these industry councils such as Alberta Pork play an important role in protecting export markets?

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, of course they do, but we have to work together. Let's not lose sight of the fact that we have to work with the federal government. We have to work with CFIA. We have to have all our ducks in a row. We work with these people every day to make sure that those are the protocols that we have in place.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. We all realize that Alberta Beef Producers played a huge role in the BSE crisis. We probably expect the same from Alberta Pork. To the same minister: since making check-offs on pork refundable, which Bill 43 would do, weakens the pork industry at a time when it needs strength and unity to face a crisis, will the minister delay Bill 43 until all its effects can be thought through?

Mr. Groeneveld: Mr. Speaker, why was I not surprised with that question after the set-up from the last question? Maybe give me a little time to think about this.

Of course, what this will do for the pork industry, as the beef industry, as the other associations: they will have to become more accountable. They'll have to think out of the box. They'll probably have to come up with some new ideas to make sure that it works for all their producers, every one of them in there, and they will not lose any money in the check-off procedure.

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

Education Public Satisfaction Survey

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For Alberta to remain on the leading edge, we need to be constantly evaluating how our education system is performing. I understand that Alberta Education conducts surveys with random samples of students, parents, teachers, and school board members as well as the public to measure our overall satisfaction with the quality of the education system. This is important data as it complements the hard data we have such as test results, dropout and completion rates, and postsecondary transition rates. My questions are all for the Minister of Education. The surveys have shown that public satisfaction with Alberta's education system has been consistently lower than that of students, parents, teachers, and school board members. Can the minister explain why that is?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member is correct. The public's satisfaction is lower than that of those who are directly involved in the school system, and I think that, in fact, is the answer, that people who are directly involved with the school system get their information through the school system, either from school newsletters or from the schools directly, so they have a higher degree of association with the system, and it's encouraging to know that they have a higher degree of faith in the system. The public – and our surveys show this because we ask the questions – tends to

get their information from the media; therefore, they have less satisfaction with the system.

2:40

Ms Woo-Paw: Does the ministry make adjustments or modifications to survey methodologies, questions, and respondent groups to address ongoing changes to the content of K to 12?

Mr. Hancock: Yes, Mr. Speaker, we do review the questions annually and make changes as appropriate. We want to make sure that the measures fit the goals of our business plan, that we're addressing the relevant needs of our stakeholder groups. For example, self-identified aboriginal high school students and their parents were added as respondent groups. Parents of students with severe special needs are surveyed as well. We break down the results for respondent groups by geographic region, for example, and in other areas. In addition, jurisdiction surveys are now available in 10 different languages to make sure that we can get a full response from all parents in the system.

Ms Woo-Paw: Does the ministry work with stakeholders in developing and updating the methodologies, contents, and scope of the provincial jurisdiction surveys?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, in fact, we do. We worked with stakeholders in developing the surveys in the first place back in 1995, and now we have an advisory group made up of school boards that work with us on the design implementation of the accountability pillar surveys to assess school jurisdiction performance. We receive advice and feedback on the choice and composition of groups to be surveyed, the general survey content such as the linkage between measures and survey questions, processes for survey administration, timelines, and feature enhancements. Yes, we have an advisory committee. We do take advice on what should be in the surveys and how they should support the accountability pillars.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 108 questions in responses today. In 30 seconds from now we'll move on with the Routine.

Presenting Petitions

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my distinct pleasure to be able to present a petition today regarding the issue of centralized cytology labs. The petition reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to introduce legislation to put a moratorium on the centralization of gynecological cytology laboratory services in the Province of Alberta.

The petition has 668 signatures.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Bill 45 Electoral Boundaries Commission Amendment Act, 2009

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce a bill on behalf of the Minister of Justice and Attorney General. I request

leave to introduce Bill 45, the Electoral Boundaries Commission Amendment Act, 2009.

Under the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act a commission must be appointed to review existing electoral boundaries and make proposals for change where appropriate. The Electoral Boundaries Commission Act also requires the commission to submit a report that divides Alberta into 83 proposed electoral divisions. The amendments in Bill 45 will require an electoral boundaries commission to be established no later than July 31, 2009, and prepare a report dividing Alberta into 87 proposed electoral divisions. Bill 45 will help ensure the political representation reflects the changing population of the province and that these changes are in place in a timely fashion.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 45 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today which are directly related to the Calgary-Varsity constituency, which I have the honour of representing. The first is the 2nd Chapter of Light up the World, an event in memory of Captain Nichola Goddard, who would have celebrated her 29th birthday with her family on May 2 had she not been killed in action leading her troops into battle in Afghanistan. The money raised will benefit the people of Papua New Guinea.

My second tabling, from last Friday, is the opening of the smart new building for Smart Technologies in Varsity's research park. In addition to the fact that it is built to the LEED gold standard, viewed from above, it symbolically represents the capital letter E of education, which is key to Alberta's future.

My third tabling is the program celebrating the 75th anniversary of John Paul II Polish school in Calgary. Our Lady Queen of Peace church is located at 2111 Uxbridge Drive N.W. in Calgary-Varsity.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of letters opposing the delisting of gender reassignment surgery. The letters argue that the procedure is medically necessary, that the savings to the government are extremely small, and that delisting will likely lead to a costly legal challenge. The letters are written by Brendan Van Alstine, James Swanson, Michael Lepar, and Jamie-Lynn Garvin.

Orders of the Day

Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 204 Provincial-Municipal Tax Sharing Act

[Debate adjourned April 27: Mr. Danyluk speaking]

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs to continue.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure to continue on with my presentation on Bill 204.

Mr. Speaker, as I've said before, strong communities are a priority for this government, and we are supporting them. However, the

challenges facing Alberta's municipalities are complex. They are as wide ranging as the unique nature of municipalities themselves. What we are doing and what we will continue to do is talk to municipalities about the importance of sustainability, their challenge, and the possible solutions.

The Minister's Council on Municipal Sustainability played an important role to help develop long-term solutions to address these challenges. The council presented a report, we listened, and we took action on a number of the council's recommendations, including the creation of the municipal sustainability initiative, the creation of the Capital Region Board.

The board has now presented their long-range regional plan, which has been developed to benefit not only the citizens of the region but all of Alberta. We will continue to look at ways to promote greater communication, collaboration, and co-operation amongst municipalities.

While progress has been made, what is clear to me is that the issues facing municipalities are complex. They go beyond funding. That is why I see this bill as overly simplistic and inflexible, and I cannot support it.

Municipalities are diverse. Their challenges are diverse. The solutions need to and will be diverse. That is also why I will continue to discuss the issue of long-term sustainability with municipalities. Alberta and Albertans need strong municipalities. Albertans deserve strong and safe communities, and this government will continue to support them.

My top priority as the Minister of Municipal Affairs is to ensure that our province has those sustainable communities for Albertans to thrive in. This is a priority for our Premier, my ministry, and the government of Alberta today and into the future.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to join debate on Bill 204, the Provincial-Municipal Tax Sharing Act, brought forward by my colleague from Edmonton-Centre. I think it is a very timely bill. I think it addresses not only a timely and current but ongoing issue of real concern to municipalities big and small in the province of Alberta.

You know, Mr. Speaker, there is a difference between simple, as in straightforward, and simplistic, as in: tries to apply an easy answer to a complex problem. I do not believe that this bill is simplistic.

2:50

Indeed, I believe that the Minister of Municipal Affairs, in listening to his remarks just a moment ago and reviewing *Hansard* from a week ago, when he began to speak in debate on Bill 204, has gone to some length to come up with anything he could throw against the wall to object to this bill. On the one hand, he says that the municipal sustainability initiative provides operating money and that "the two large centres" – I guess he means Edmonton and Calgary – "had the opportunity to have some of their funding put into operating. Their decision was that they wanted all funding to come as capital, and that's exactly what we did."

On the other hand, he goes on to argue that there's this incredible autonomy that municipalities have under MSI to determine their local priorities, choose their projects to meet their citizens' needs. But then he says that MSI, unlike Bill 204, "includes measures to ensure that we are accountable to Alberta taxpayers for funds provided to municipalities." Then he goes on to say:

Projects [have to] meet program criteria designed to ensure that they will contribute to the long-term sustainability of Alberta communi-

ties. Municipalities must submit a long-term infrastructure plan as well as detailed information about each project to be funded through MSI.

He says further, “We are also developing an accountability framework to ensure that funds provided to municipalities are used to meet agreed-upon objectives.” Then he slaps Bill 204 for not including any of these accountability measures. All Bill 204 would do is “provide a fixed proportion of tax revenue unconditionally.” Well, it’s a fixed proportion of tax revenue that would be reviewed on an annual basis, Mr. Speaker.

But I will agree with the minister that, yes, it is unconditional. That is the point. MSI is anything but enabling of municipal autonomy to make their own determinations. It is full of conditions and requirements and quid pro quos and strings. It has more strings attached to it than, you know, even a lot of the legislation that has come forward from this government. It is overwhelmingly, quite apart from what the municipalities choose, about the provision of funding for capital and for infrastructure. What we are saying with Bill 204, Mr. Speaker, simply and in a straightforward manner, is this. The cities and towns of Alberta need sustainable, predictable operating funding that generates enough funding to be able to meet their operational requirements year in and year out.

Over primarily the last 15 or 16 years, but it’s been a trend that’s been going on for, you know, probably several decades now, federal and provincial governments have been downloading responsibilities onto lower levels of government, whether that is the municipal government, whether that’s school boards – this isn’t really a form of government – even the volunteer sector. The responsibilities have been downloaded to people and organizations and corporations and governments below this level of government at the provincial level, yet we haven’t been correspondingly downloading the revenue that we scoop up to these lower organizations – that sounds terribly pejorative the way I put it, but you get my point: the organizations beneath us on the governmental and community org chart, if you will – so that they can actually afford to pay for the responsibilities that we have asked them to undertake on our behalf or in place of what we used to do at the provincial level.

Mr. Speaker, if this hasn’t been said before in debate on Bill 204, it surely will be said again, I would imagine. It needs to be said and reiterated and contemplated and thought about, and we need to wrap our heads around this. There is only one taxpayer. There are a number of levels of government clamouring to get their hands into that taxpayer’s pocket, but municipalities are like the runt of the litter at lunchtime when it comes to being able to do that. Of all the taxes that are paid by a household in this province, 92 to 95 per cent go to the federal government and the government of Alberta. That leaves, depending on who’s doing the calculation, just between 5 and 8 per cent of the taxes to go to the municipality.

But the municipalities increasingly are providing more services to increasingly larger populations, and the cost of providing those services continues to go up, whether it’s collecting the garbage and the recycling, whether it is providing through family, community, and social services, you know, social programs, whether it is operating the inventory of social housing that exists, whether it’s providing or having a hand in providing the support that we envision will come to the homeless under the Housing First models being advocated by the Calgary 10-year plan to end homelessness, the Edmonton plan to end homelessness, other municipalities’ plans to end homelessness, and the overarching province of Alberta 10-year plan to end homelessness. You know, those services need to be provided at the local level, and they take local dollars to do it.

More than 80 per cent of us live in urban areas, Mr. Speaker, and we need the level of government. In fact, it is simply done this way

on a daily basis that the level of government closest to us, the citizens, provides a very large part of the services that we use every day, and they need to be able to pay for that. Municipal sustainability initiative funding is going to capital projects and is not being used for operating expenses. Even if the minister had directed that the \$50 million that MSI provides for operating be required to be spent that way by the cities, it wouldn’t be enough.

Some quick calculations here, and I’ll just give you the rationale for how we figured these numbers out. The operating shortfall for any municipality is difficult to determine because, of course, municipalities aren’t allowed to have operating shortfalls, but they do in reality. We looked at the amounts that Edmonton and Calgary proposed to increase their property taxes for 2009. We then added the amount that the two cities took from their reserve funds, because you have to dip into your reserve funds to pay the bills that you can’t otherwise afford to pay, and then we added in the amount that each city received in grants and subsidies. We understand the total of those numbers to be approximately the funding shortfall for each city’s operating expenses.

For Edmonton we came up with a shortfall of \$104 million. For Calgary we came up with a shortfall of \$131 million. As you can see, \$50 million divided two ways won’t come close to addressing those operating shortfalls, let alone all the other cities and towns in the rest of Alberta where the other one-third, roughly, of the population lives. On the other hand, 2.5 per cent of the income tax that the province collected in 2008-2009, last year’s provincial income taxes, recognizing, as we’ve discussed in estimates debates and so on, that that would be a lesser number in the year going forward to some extent, would be close to \$310 million. We assume the similar ratios to those used to allocate MSI funding. That’s 34 per cent, or \$105 million, to Calgary; 25 per cent, or about \$77 million, to Edmonton; 41 per cent, or \$126 million, to the other municipalities.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there other participants? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to speak in favour of Bill 204, Provincial-Municipal Tax Sharing Act. The purpose of Bill 204 is to ensure a predictable revenue stream for municipalities. The funding would go towards municipalities’ operating expenses, which would lessen funding shortfalls for those operating expenses. The bill would allocate 2.5 per cent, roughly \$300 million, of income taxes collected by the province to go back to the municipalities. This bill would allow for the percentage of income taxes that would be allocated to municipalities to be changed after one year. That indicates the flexibility built into Bill 204. It’s extremely important that we’re clear that we’re not asking for a tax increase but relocating current tax revenues. That’s extremely important. We’re not saying: let’s top up the taxes. As the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie previously mentioned, there is only one taxpayer, and given this global recession that we currently find ourselves within, that pocket is unfortunately shrinking.

3:00

The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie talked about the limitations of the municipal sustainability initiative, and that problem has to do with the whim of the provincial government. It takes sort of a patriarchal view that we will provide the municipalities with whatever we deem fit as opposed to consulting them and freeing them up to use money as needed. Now, to the province’s credit they do provide money through the local gas tax. The municipalities do

receive a portion of that, much of which, I'm sure, goes into the municipal sustainability initiative.

However, what we have seen in this province since 1994 and what has continued on up until last year is centralization of power controlled by the province. In 1994, under the guise of equivalency and efficiency, the government reduced the number of locally elected school boards. It removed the autonomy that school boards had through the collection of the educational portion of their property tax, which back in 1994 accounted for half of their revenue. We have seen this last year health boards reduced to one. Previously we had 17 regional health authorities taken down to nine and most recently to one. So what we see in this province is an eroding of the powers and potentials of municipally elected officials to govern as they were elected to do.

The municipalities regard the tax collection by the province as a type of cash cow. The province takes a considerably large portion of the income that a municipality generates and then returns a fraction of it in the form of grants, grants which frequently have fairly closely tied strings attached to them. What Bill 204, the Provincial-Municipal Tax Sharing Act, does is that it guarantees autonomy to municipalities. It guarantees that a portion of the income tax the residents pay to the province is returned to them, where services are most urgently needed.

Now, an argument this provincial government uses frequently is with regard to immigration to Alberta. We hear over and over again in this House that immigrants to Alberta do not bring with them their schools. They do not carry their hospitals or their recreational facilities or their fire halls on their backs. Therefore, it's through the largesse of the province that these services are provided. Well, Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that that's a lot of baloney, for lack of a better word, because the people that immigrate to Alberta bring with them their revenue in the form of income tax. They bring with them their revenue in the form of the property taxes which they're charged. This isn't just largesse on the part of the province providing these services to the people freely, but what happens is that the province filters the services, and the municipalities and those living in the cities are expected to be extremely grateful for the generosity shown by the province. What Bill 204 says is that these people are entitled to their money, that where their services are provided is where their money should be spent.

Yes, in a democracy there is an expectation that we all share in the betterment of the province, in the betterment of the country; thus, we pay federal taxes and we pay municipal taxes and, of course, provincial taxes. But by the time the two upper levels of government have drawn their share, which the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie pointed out was in the area of 92 per cent, there's very little left for the front line, and the front line, of course, is the municipality. What Bill 204, the Provincial-Municipal Tax Sharing Act, does is that it guarantees the security to local municipalities. They know that whatever the tax rate is that is set by the province and by the federal government – you can do the math – 2.5 per cent will be returned to the municipalities if Bill 204 is adopted. That provides stability. It provides sustainability. It provides a degree of predictability to municipalities as opposed to the offerings by the province.

Now, the province did make a 10-year commitment through MSI, but what it hasn't taken into account is the global recessionary effects, so those percentages may be reduced again at the whim of the province, who is in the driver's seat on MSI funding. Also, as I've indicated before and as the other members from Calgary-Currie and from Edmonton-Centre have indicated, this sort of poor cousin placement of municipalities dependent on the largesse of the federal government and the provincial government takes them out of the direct ability to provide the services to their constituents.

I find it interesting that municipalities, for example, from an electoral governance basis, are able to look after a million individuals through their ward system, which is less than half of what provincial representation is required. So if we're looking potentially at reducing electoral expenses and looking at, for example, what aldermen have to do in terms of governance, then maybe we should be looking at reducing the number of constituencies within the cities. If federal MPs can have this larger representation and aldermen can have a larger representation, maybe in the interests of a smaller and more efficient government we should be viewing a reduction in electoral constituencies and truly reflecting the fact that two-thirds of Albertans live in the cities.

It is those two-thirds that would benefit most directly, of course, from Bill 204, the Provincial-Municipal Tax Sharing Act. That would not leave their rural friends and family out of the picture because the Provincial-Municipal Tax Sharing Act not only offers support to Calgary and Edmonton but to Medicine Hat, to Red Deer and Lethbridge, all the smaller municipalities. Let's not forget the terrific contribution of Fort McMurray that would be strengthened by the application of Bill 204, the Provincial-Municipal Tax Sharing Act.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, then Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy I was first on that list because I think I lost track throughout that as to who was next.

I appreciate the opportunity to rise today to speak to Bill 204, the Provincial-Municipal Tax Sharing Act in 2009. This was of interest to me as I have an alderman in Calgary who is a member of my board of directors, and I had a chance to discuss this with him amongst a few other people as well.

3:10

As the previous speakers have mentioned, this bill seeks to allocate two and a half per cent of personal and corporate income tax to Alberta's municipalities. It has received a bit of media attention. The first time I heard about it in the media was on April 2 from the *Edmonton Sun*, and interestingly enough there is a Facebook group that's been established. I see the Member for Calgary-Currie here and the Member for Calgary-Buffalo, I see an alderman in my area, and I also see a cousin of mine, actually, who's a member here, so I'll have to chat with him about that. He wears my colours. Don't worry. He very much wears my colours.

The Speaker: Having some relevancy with respect to the question at hand would be in order.

Mr. Denis: Oh. Yes, sir.

In essence, the finances would be collected to a provincial account known as the provincial-municipal tax sharing account. The relevancy earlier, Mr. Speaker, was that this was referenced, again, in Facebook. I think social media is a good thing.

I assume, Mr. Speaker, because it's not clear in the legislation, that these funds would be divvied up amongst our local governments. The rationale behind this legislation is that the dedicated funds would provide Alberta's local governments with additional sources of revenue that would be reliable, stable, and unconditional. The fact is that this government has continually demonstrated its commitment to the sustainability and development of Alberta's municipalities through many grant programs. Indeed, there are up

to 80 different grants available to municipalities through 13 different ministries, all designed to support Alberta's communities.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Perhaps the sponsoring member felt as though there is a need to dedicate a specific amount of provincial revenue to support the growth municipalities have experienced in the past decade. However, Mr. Speaker, the municipal sustainability initiative, which I'll refer to as the MSI, was developed to address this growth. If municipalities need to undertake projects to meet demands related to this growth, they can apply and receive funds pursuant to the MSI. Projects can include building or improving roads, bridges, public transit, and water supply, treatment, and distribution systems.

Since 2007 a total of \$900 million has been distributed through MSI, and this year's budget allocates an additional \$400 million to MSI, which will again rise next year, to \$1.2 billion. What's the total? That's \$11 billion over 10 years, unprecedented throughout this nation. These increases are designed to support municipalities by providing equivalent funding when compared to the amount of money collected through the education property taxes. Suffice it to say, Mr. Speaker, that this government has supported and continues to support municipalities through these times of substantial growth, which leads me to the conclusion that Bill 204, however well intended, is both needless and redundant.

I think it is important to remind the sponsoring member of the other grants that this government offers to support municipalities. For example, Alberta Transportation offers the Alberta municipal infrastructure program, which specifically is designed to provide financial assistance to municipalities for infrastructure projects that maintain or enhance the economic, social, and cultural opportunity of a municipality. This includes capital projects such as roadways, waste water collection and treatment systems, cultural and recreational filings, and solid waste management systems.

The government also offers the regional partnerships initiative, which focuses on promoting and fostering regional co-operation and cost savings by facilitating projects that involve three or four municipalities. There are two components to the regional partnership initiative, exploration and implementation. The exploration grant allows municipalities to evaluate the feasibility of a project such as amalgamating water services or developing a regional governance structure or business plan. If the exploration process suggests that the project will be beneficial, the implementation component of the regional partnerships initiative can assist municipalities with its implementation.

Mr. Speaker, I could go on to discuss many other programs that government offers to municipalities, but the reality is that there is substantial support for Alberta's municipalities to manage both growth-related and non growth-related capital and operational pressures. Furthermore, these municipal supports ensure openness and accountability and are a demonstration of this government's prudent financial management. It was not so long ago that members of the opposition were criticizing the government's spending patterns, suggesting we needed to reprioritize spending and reallocate finances.

In summary, I find myself somewhat confused as to how Bill 204 would save this government money or demonstrate a, quote, reprioritization. This government has already made our municipalities a priority, which is demonstrated by the many municipal grants and initiatives that I have outlined.

Furthermore, the funds that Bill 204 suggests that the government allocate to municipalities must come at the expense of other programs, and I look forward to hearing from the sponsoring

member in her closing speech as to what provincial services she believes we should cut. Would she cut health care? Would she cut education? Would she cut any specific services? I'm looking forward to hearing that, Mr. Speaker.

Regardless, Mr. Speaker, Bill 204 is a redundant bill and therefore unnecessary. For these reasons, I'm unable to support it. I will table my references to the page.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to be able to rise to join in on this debate on this interesting piece of legislation proposed by the Member for Edmonton-Centre. In general, I believe it is the intention of our caucus to be supporting this bill. It's a bill that, as has been stated already, would allocate 2.5 per cent of income tax revenue into an account for municipalities, which would provide roughly \$300 million more a year to municipalities.

As has been discussed already, this is not the only source of funding for municipalities. Indeed, there are a number of other sources of funding from the government for municipalities. But the key element to this bill and the proposal here, of course, is that this funding would be unconditional and would allow for long-term planning and would allow for support for operational funding and operational funding deficits. As all members of this House know, there do appear to be a number of municipalities who are reporting significant financial difficulty at this time. My understanding is that the number is roughly around 60 municipalities across the province who report these kinds of difficulties.

As we know, the biggest source of revenue for most municipalities is the property tax, but there is a limit with respect to how much revenue can be brought in through that mechanism. At the same time while that limit is in place, the municipalities themselves have a growing demand for services placed upon them not only from the federal government through its 15 years of downloading services onto municipalities but also through the provincial government and also through their own population, which, quite importantly, are becoming increasingly engaged in their municipal politics as that is, of course, the government which is closest to home, as it were.

A number of people think first to go to their municipality to demand a number of services, and that's not unreasonable in many cases. Of course, because the municipalities are, as it were, on the ground, they are often in the best position to provide leadership on the resolution of certain issues. You know, a perfect example of that is the housing issue. We've seen both the city of Edmonton and the city of Calgary lead the way in large part on the issue of dealing with housing and homelessness. I'm not sure that I necessarily agree that the processes that they've adopted are utterly the best, but there's no question that they are trying to make a commitment to address the issue, and we have the provincial government appearing to follow behind in that regard.

We have, for instance, talk about the need for homelessness strategies. I believe the city of Edmonton suggested we'd be looking at about \$3 billion, and I believe the city of Calgary talked about \$4.5 billion. Then, unfortunately, the provincial government has committed much less than that amount and even in claiming to fund that this year has taken every single dollar from other housing funds in order to support their so-called investment in this particular housing fund. In fact, we have sort of a follow the bouncing ball kind of process, where we ultimately find that the net investment in housing on the part of the provincial government hasn't gone up a single red cent. Ultimately, it will fall to the municipalities to shoulder that burden as they have been for some time.

3:20

That's just an example. I mean, that's certainly not the only example. Most of that funding doesn't come out of operational funds, but it's an example of how municipalities are taking on greater and greater roles in terms of the services that they provide to the cities. It's just an example of the circumstances which are leading to the situation where we have municipalities suffering operational deficits.

To go back a little bit to the municipal sustainability initiative, the NDP does support, in general, that fund. There are good things that come from that fund. We would like to see its allocation criteria amended somewhat so that it's not based on kilometres of local roads because we'd rather not see municipalities be encouraged to build yet more sprawling subdivisions with windy lanes that absolutely nobody without three GPS systems and two different maps and two navigators can get through. Rather, we'd like to see a denser type of development premised on the notion of enhanced public transportation. That's why we think the municipal sustainability initiative can be tweaked to make some improvements. Notwithstanding that, it is still conditional, and it still is premised on a 10-year duration. That doesn't provide the ability for unconditional operational funding which allows for planning that goes beyond that 10-year period.

That, of course, is the kind of thing that we would see provided to municipalities through the bill that we're looking at at this time. It's for this reason that we think that members of this House should consider supporting this bill. We need to look at the changing relationship between municipalities, the provincial government, and the federal government, we need to look at the changing demands that we place upon our municipalities, and we need to look at the very constrained set of financial resources at the disposal of municipalities, a system that was put in place when, I think, the expectations vis-à-vis municipalities were very different. We must then look at the whole issue of how that can be changed.

We know that municipalities, like other parts of government across the province, are suffering from a very, very significant infrastructure debt, one created by this province and the federal government but more by this province over the course of many years as they tried to hide their debt in things as opposed to off the books. That debt has not been addressed, notwithstanding the funding which had certainly started to kick in over the last couple of years or maybe even more than that. Nonetheless, because of the inflationary pressures at the time we know that municipalities are still struggling with tremendous infrastructure debt, and we think that this is a time for this kind of investment in particular to be considered and not dismissed. These are job-creating investments. We know that in the long term that is another objective which this government should be focusing itself towards, given the current economic situation that we're all experiencing.

As I said before, it's with these general reasons in mind that our caucus will be supporting this particular bill. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to speak in favour of Bill 204, which will go a long way to solving maybe not all of the operating needs of municipalities, but I think it will pretty well solve most of the problems. This bill is a step in the right direction to ensure predictable funding for municipalities. This will provide funding for the municipalities just for operating expenses only, not for infrastructure. It will lessen the shortfalls in operating expenses that municipalities have from time to time.

This bill will allow the government to allocate 2.5 per cent, roughly \$300 million, a year from the income tax the province collects to go toward municipalities. We're talking about all of the municipalities here. We want to be clear that, you know, this is not a tax increase. This bill will be reallocating the current revenues that the province collects in personal income taxes, and the money collected from the personal income taxes will go toward municipalities. That will be 2.5 per cent.

While the province has downloaded a number of responsibilities to the municipalities, municipalities lack the ability to generate enough revenue to meet the current operating costs. This bill will provide a stable revenue stream so that municipalities can better meet their current operating needs without having to increase property taxes or raid their reserve funds if they have any.

During the boom times there was lots of migration. It put lots of pressure on the municipalities to hire more police officers, more firefighters. They had to build more fire stations, and that put lots of pressure on the municipalities. They are limited in raising their taxes. Edmonton is an example of a municipality facing a shortfall of operating expenses. Expenditures rose by 7.2 per cent in 2009, but the revenues, excluding property taxes, increased only by 0.9 per cent. If a municipality is having difficulty in funding existing programs or funding the creation of new programs, they only have a couple of options. They can either raise the property taxes, or they can cut existing programs and defer future projects, or municipalities can tap into reserve funds they may have saved.

Although municipalities are not allowed to run deficits on their operating budgets, they have to adopt extreme measures to meet their funding shortfalls. Calgary raised property taxes 5.3 per cent. I think next year they're going to rise by 4.6 per cent. There was a big hue and cry. People were almost up in arms because the property taxes were going up and because that's hitting people hard, you know, in their pockets. In Edmonton they raised property taxes 3.6 per cent for 2009. Both Edmonton and Calgary couldn't raise enough taxes to meet their operating needs. They had to cut back on their existing programs and future projects. They had to even tap into their reserve funds.

Of all the taxes raised by the governments, 95 per cent goes to the provincial and federal governments. Only 5 per cent goes to the municipalities. I think the municipalities should get a larger share of household taxes, and this bill will achieve that by giving municipalities some share of the personal income taxes collected by the province. This 2.5 per cent figure was arrived at by taking into consideration the operating shortfall for all of the municipalities. It is difficult to put an exact number, but this figure will almost correct the shortfall the municipalities face.

3:30

We determined that 2.5 per cent of the income tax the province collected in 2008-2009 would be a good amount because in some sense approximately we added all those figures up. The municipalities, you know, the shortfall they took out of the reserve fund and all the other shortfalls they had, we added them all up, and that's the number we arrived at. It would be a reasonable number, 2.5 per cent, to reallocate income taxes to the municipalities.

This funding will help support upgrading needs of municipalities, but it would not solve all their financial difficulties. For example, we have not included the unfunded capital plan for either city nor the gap in infrastructure funding that has been identified. Considering that \$1.3 billion is needed to fill Edmonton's infrastructure funding gap, the amount that would be allocated by this bill is not really extravagant. That's not really a big amount. This will only help the municipalities for their operating expenses.

There is also a mechanism within this bill that will allow for the 2.5 per cent to be changed one year after the fund is created. We decided on 2.5 per cent of income taxes to create the fund, which is a minimum amount because of the current tough economic times. Moreover, the fact that there's a mechanism that would alter the percentage allocated to the municipalities is a good response to the argument that 2.5 per cent would be too much or too onerous for an already cash-strapped province. As the economy slows down, maybe the municipality's operating expenses will come down, so this 2.5 per cent number can be changed.

Although there is a provincial and a municipal revenue sharing formula there, those unconditional grants account for less than 25 per cent of all provincial municipal grants, and some of the money has strings tied to it, that it cannot be used for operating expenses. The Alberta Municipal Government Act sees municipalities as little more than the provider of a few local services and gives municipalities few tools to raise their taxes, so that relationship doesn't work any more. It is time to see the municipalities in Alberta as an important level of government in their own right.

Strong municipalities are essential to Alberta's future. More than 80 per cent of Albertans live in urban areas. Our cities, towns, villages, and hamlets are the levels of government closest to us and provide service that we use every day. Local governments are in the best position to lead Alberta into the future, by developing a sustainable transportation system, improving our land use, and becoming our environment leaders. Lots of services have been downloaded, offloaded to the municipalities by the provincial government, and I think they need this funding to cover their operating expenses.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Dallas: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure to rise today and join in the debate on Bill 204, the Provincial-Municipal Tax Sharing Act, which, of course, has been brought forward by the Member for Edmonton-Centre. Bill 204 proposes to apportion 2.5 per cent of income tax revenue to a provincial-municipal tax-sharing account.

The preamble of this bill states that municipalities in Alberta require both stable and predictable funding. However, Mr. Speaker, this government provides significant long-term funding for municipalities through programs such as the municipal sustainability initiative, better known as the MSI. MSI is a program that in 2009 will provide municipalities with \$400 million in funding. Not only that, but this 10-year commitment to funding will see an unprecedented amount allocated to municipalities. The MSI is one of many programs that are available to municipalities, such as the Alberta municipal infrastructure program, the gas tax fund, and the building Canada fund. This government supports all municipalities while recognizing their autonomy. Bill 204 is redundant as this government already has in place significant and long-term funding.

I would like to raise some concerns that I have with Bill 204, particularly how this new account will be funded and the impact that funding will have on all Albertans. Alberta prides itself on having one of the lowest tax structures in Canada, with a 10 per cent flat tax rate and no provincial sales tax. Mr. Speaker, income tax is one of the largest sources of revenue for both federal and provincial governments, accounting for over 30 per cent of all tax revenues. This past year personal income taxes accounted for approximately 22.3 per cent of provincial revenues, and corporate income tax accounted for 9.8 per cent.

The preamble states that "municipalities in Alberta require a stable and predictable level of funding from the Government to effectively plan and deliver services and programs." However, I do not see how this account could be considered predictable and stable, particularly since revenue from taxes fluctuates year to year. This fact seems to contradict the intent of this bill. Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure how the member for Edmonton-Centre can see this proposed account as being stable and predictable.

Revenue from income taxes is deposited into the province's general revenue fund. From there these funds are used by the government to pay for public programs such as health care, education, and infrastructure. Money is allocated from the general revenue fund to ministries based on need. For example, in 2008 Health and Wellness required 34 per cent of the year's budget. By allocating 2.5 per cent to the proposed provincial-municipal tax sharing account, 2.5 per cent will have to be cut from ministries. Not only that, but it will take away from programs that help every single Albertan. Ministries such as Health and Wellness and Education help each and every Albertan and have a direct impact on the lives of all Albertans, as do many other government programs.

Mr. Speaker, another point that I'd like to raise about Bill 204 is that it would require additional bureaucracy to manage the fund. Once again, this bill requires this government to spend more. I question why the Member for Edmonton-Centre is asking this government to spend money in a time when it may not be fiscally prudent to do so.

In addition to creating more bureaucracy, this bill also calls for the creation of a Legislature committee to convene every year and draft new legislation. The members opposite claim that this government would be more fiscally responsible; however, this bill would seem to contradict this statement.

The Member for Calgary-Currie stated recently in this House that "this government needs to get a handle on its spending." This statement stands in complete contradiction to this bill, as this bill is proposing additional government spending. It seems that these members cannot get all of these priorities straight. One minute they want us to stop spending, yet they introduce legislation requiring more spending.

A final and important note that I would like to make, Mr. Speaker, is that Bill 204 has all the appearances of a money bill, which a private member cannot bring forward. Certain sections try and get around this by creating further legislation; however, in all appearances this would be a money bill. Even with this provision of creating further legislation, this bill has requirements on the financial initiative of the government, thus making it a money bill. If passed, Bill 204 would clearly impact the government's ability to raise and spend money. Automatically dedicating revenue to municipalities is problematic as it reduces the government's ability to direct spending to its highest priorities and does not allow fiscal flexibility.

Ultimately, Mr. Speaker, I cannot support this bill, and I encourage other members to do the same. Thank you.

3:40

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

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise in support of Bill 204, the Provincial-Municipal Tax Sharing Act, as proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

I as one of the 80 per cent of Albertans who reside in our cities would appreciate this act as a form of creating for cities a consistent, stable flow of money that would go towards operating expenses. I think that's where some of the confusion is had by some of the government members who have already spoken. They continue to

refer to the MSI funding, which is for capital costs and capital initiatives, that this Bill 204 is not dealing with; it's dealing with the operating funds.

Before I get into the intent of the bill, I don't really see that this is looking for an increase to what is already spent. What this is more looking for a consistent flow of money that is already created through the provincial coffers that is earmarked for our cities to provide the essential services that the cities provide. I think anyone who has been in Alberta for any number of years would reference that cities have become the front line of providing services to the people.

Also, anyone who has been here for any period of time has heard the impact of cuts to cities and that cities have been sort of left behind in being provided with funds. They've had services continually downloaded upon them by other levels of government, both federal and provincial. There's a strong argument that's presented by the AUMA and other organizations like that that references the fact that cities have had these responsibilities downloaded to them by other levels of government without having any provision of finances attached to them. I guess this bill would address some of that disparity and recognize that cities are major players in the Alberta landscape. They provide a significant service to the Alberta populace, and it is much needed.

On another note, although I will not concede that this is, in fact, an additional spending mechanism to be put forward, I think the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont asked where we'd begin cutting. I guess I'll list some of those that I see that could be cut that we've brought up from time to time. I will go through the exercise now because we were asked. I would note that my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Centre has many other things to comment on as I see her busy taking notes to answer on this bill, so I'll try to save her some time here.

One would be that we've put in an amendment this year to eliminate \$33 million, I think, from Horse Racing Alberta that we would like to see gotten rid of. We've seen numerous hosting expenses that have been what we would consider above and beyond what would be necessary in these times of strain. Also, let's talk about some of the bonuses to senior-level civil servants who are already getting substantially rewarded.

Let's also think of future spending. Increasing the number of MLAs: I would suggest that, at least, the last thing Albertans need is four more MLAs. That's just my honest-to-goodness opinion. We can do with what we have in this House and, you know, find enough work for everyone. That's just my honest-to-goodness opinion.

So if you're looking at savings, there are some I listed for you. We can start from there. If the books ever get opened up more around here, I'm sure I could find a little more to go down and take the trimmings to. That's a start. I was asked for it; otherwise, I would've never brought it up. Since I was asked, I do try to respond from time to time.

If we look at other things, the municipalities, like I said, are an important part of our increasingly urban structure, where people are living, where people are stimulating our economy, and where it seems to be that much of the growth is occurring. I again would say that this is a necessary bill that would go a long way to ensuring that essential operating dollars are reaching the areas that need it the most. It would also allow cities to I guess decide for themselves what is important for them to do and important to their citizens and not be beholden to a senior level of government that may be doing things to appease a different agenda that they may be following that may not be the same agenda that the cities are wishing to follow.

Those are my comments, and I thank you for the time you've given me to speak in strong support of this bill. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other member who wishes to join the debate?

Seeing none, now I shall recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre to close the debate.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I was very pleased to welcome the participation of those that did participate, including the minister and the members for Calgary-Egmont and Red Deer-South. It was a very interesting exercise to shine the light on how well government members understand municipal funding and the current situation that many of the municipalities believe that they find themselves in. It was an excellent opportunity for me to start and in some cases continue a dialogue with the many fine municipalities in Alberta. That was a real opportunity for me, and I enjoyed it very much. I did correspond with several dozen municipalities, and I'm very grateful for that.

Just let me talk very briefly about the MSI funding, which I think every single member referenced. I set out to create a funding stream for municipalities that would be stable, predictable, and would not come with any strings attached, and this government is very fond of putting strings on any money that they give out, including the MSI funding.

The MSI funding is time limited. It's a 10-year program, which we're several years into, and it is focused on capital and infrastructure funding. The history of it came out of the tremendous infrastructure debt that the province created on behalf of the municipalities and left the municipalities to deal with. Those from Calgary will appreciate that history because it was their mayor who was most instrumental and very aggressive in pursuing the provincial government to come up with some funding money to be able to address that infrastructure debt. I think at one point the infrastructure debt in the province was estimated to be somewhere in the \$8 billion mark – I'm sorry; there might be a zero on the end of that – so there was a lot to catch up on, and that's what that fund was meant to do, and it is doing it.

There was a very small component in that, I think about \$50 million, that was available for operating money. In fact, by the time you divided that up amongst the municipalities, it was such a small amount of money that it was not going to make a significant difference in any one operating allocation for a given year, and it may have prevented their being able to complete some capital programs, so as the minister indicated, it all went to capital. Bill 204 was anticipating a fund of money that was directed only to operating money, no capital money, so MSI and what I was proposing in Bill 204 did not intersect. Bill 204 was – one more time I'll say it – intended for operating funding.

3:50

The minister worried about accountability, and I find that interesting. I take his point, but I think there are a number of accountability and auditing functions already in place there, as you would expect. Certainly, the government funds are audited as they go out. The municipalities are also audited, so the money as it comes into the municipalities is audited. We also have a legislative review that was built into the act. So there's quite a bit of accountability that is available there, more, in fact, than you sometimes see with other government programs.

It was meant to be a piece of legislation that dealt with the most pressing matter before the municipalities, and that was the operating gap that they were experiencing. So, no, I didn't get into a lot of other things, and I didn't make it really complicated. [interjection] I was trying to address one thing, and I just did address it. The Minister of Health appears to have missed his opportunity to speak, but I'm happy to talk with him afterwards. [interjection] Well, he's

very exercised about it, whatever it is, but I'm sure he'll let me know afterwards.

It was my intention that the monies be distributed on a per capita basis, but I did not write that into the legislation at the time because if the legislation passed, I wanted there to be an additional debate on the best way – and that discussion should take place primarily with the municipalities – for that money to be distributed.

The Member for Calgary-Egmont talked about how the government provides 80 grants, but he includes in that things like lottery grant funding and, in fact, the federal government grants.

I encourage people to support Bill 204. It's a great move for our municipalities.

The Deputy Speaker: The chair now shall call the question on the bill.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:53 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Blakeman	Kang	Notley
Chase	MacDonald	Taylor
Hehr		

Against the motion:

Anderson	Forsyth	Morton
Berger	Groeneveld	Oberle
Calahasen	Horne	Olson
Campbell	Jablonski	Ouellette
Cao	Jacobs	Renner
Dallas	Knight	Rogers
DeLong	Leskiw	Snelgrove
Denis	Liepert	Tarchuk
Drysdale	Marz	Weadick
Elniski	McQueen	Webber
Fawcett		

Totals:	For – 7	Against – 31
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[Motion for second reading of Bill 204 lost]

Bill 205

Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure (Third Party Advertising) Amendment Act, 2009

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

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my sincere pleasure to rise today and lead off second reading debate on Bill 205, the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure (Third Party Advertising) Amendment Act, 2009.

The goal of this bill is to place clear parameters around third-party political advertising during provincial elections. Mr. Speaker, democracy is an institution that all Albertans cherish. There are several fundamental principles that are essential to an open and democratic society. These include freedom of political expression and freedom of speech, where people are free to convey their views without undue censorship by government. There's also freedom of

the press, where the news media is free to report on political happenings without political interference. It was with these democratic principles top of mind that Bill 205 was developed.

In addition to respecting fundamental democratic principles, Bill 205 recognizes the need to ensure that we have a fair and level playing field for all participants in the election marketplace of ideas. A level playing field alludes to the idea that there should be a consistent standard that all democratic participants must abide by. A level playing field means that the success and failure of the ideas put forward during an election should depend not on the size of a proponent's bank account but on the substance and merit of that idea.

I would like to go through some of the provisions of this bill to clearly illustrate how Bill 205 strikes a balance between respecting the rights of free speech, political expression, and free press with the need to keep our democratic playing field fair and level. First, this bill establishes a mechanism called the third-party election advertising account. All third parties would be required to establish such an account in order to run political advertisements during a provincial election. Contributions by donors to this account would be set at a fair limit of \$30,000 during an election year and \$15,000 in a nonelection year. These contribution limits correlate with the contribution limits the political parties are subjected to. The money raised from donors and placed in these accounts could then be spent by that third party during a provincial election.

This account mechanism provides for the advancement of interests and ideas based not on the wealth of a few but upon that idea's ability to attract popular support. In other words, if a third party can raise millions of dollars from thousands of Albertans to advance an idea, it can spend every last cent of that money raised on promoting that idea during an election. But if only a few wealthy organizations or individuals are proponents of an idea, although they are free to advocate that idea, their ability to use their large wealth to dominate the airwaves or newspapers during an election will be reasonably limited under this legislation.

All opinions and ideas from Albertans are part of our political process, even ideas that seem unpopular at first glance. I recall the words of John Stuart Mill, who stated, "If all mankind minus one were of one opinion . . . mankind would be no more justified in silencing that one person than he, if he had the power, would be justified in silencing mankind." Of course, we do limit speech that incites violence against identifiable minority groups. However, the generally accepted view of free speech in the free world is that no individual or group should be silenced except in the most extreme cases. Mr. Speaker, I want to be absolutely clear that I support this principle wholeheartedly, and in no way do the measures of this bill silence the people of Alberta. In fact, freedom of speech will be enhanced by this bill by giving all ideas and viewpoints a more equal opportunity to flourish within our open and democratic society.

Mr. Speaker, this bill would also require third parties to identify themselves on advertising and promotional materials. Identification is important in ensuring accurate communication between the third party and its targeted audience. When the electorate is adequately informed as to who is attempting to convey a message to them, they will be able to make a more educated judgment on the message itself. Thomas Jefferson understood the important connection between information and democracy when he once stated, "Whenever the people are well-informed, they can be trusted with their own government." Today accurate information is just as vital to our democratic system as it was in the past.

4:10

Another important aspect of this bill is the requirement that all third parties register with the Chief Electoral Officer if they have

incurred or plan to incur political advertising expenses in excess of \$1,000 during an election period. Bill 205 will also require a third party whose political advertising expenditures exceed \$1,000 in an election year to submit a financial report to the Chief Electoral Officer. This financial report would disclose all advertising spending and the identities of the donors who contributed more than \$375 to a party's election advertising account. This would be similar to the rules governing political parties, who also must disclose all election advertising spending and identified donors who contributed more than \$375. Ultimately, this will achieve greater accountability surrounding third-party advertising and, again, provide the electorate with more information about who is financially pushing an idea.

While I will not go through every aspect of this proposed legislation, I want to emphasize that I believe this bill strikes the balance between enhancing democratic fundamentals while also achieving a more equitable and level playing field for third-party political advertising during election periods. It will, I believe, strengthen transparency and democracy for all Albertans, so I encourage all members of this House to support this bill.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Bill 205 isn't about freedom of speech; it's about controlling speech, stifling who is and who isn't able to speak. The government currently exercises undue promotional opportunities at the expense of the public taxpayer through its Public Affairs Bureau, which employs more staff than all other provincial and federal governments combined. The Premier ran on a campaign platform of transparency and accountability, yet the Premier refused to reveal where \$163,000 of his campaign donations came from, and in this Bill 205 there is a proposition designed to prevent people from collecting that funding to express their own views.

This Bill 205 is aimed at unions, who last March 8 tried to influence the outcome of the way this government treats unionized employees in this province. Alberta is the least unionized province in Canada, yet there is a desire on the government's part to limit union membership even further and to basically limit their opportunities to vocalize their concerns, particularly during an election period. This has got nothing to do with increasing individual influence; it has to do with stifling union or collective influence. The government only wants those people they wish to hear from to have the opportunity to speak.

Now, I talked about the leadership campaign. We had a number of very creative ways in which Conservative leaders collected money. We had one individual who sold shares in himself for \$10,000 a pop, but at least he provided and indicated in his returns each of the individuals who had sort of bought a share of his piece of the pie. The hon. minister for sustainable resources refused to provide any of the donors' names or backings that funded his campaign. Likewise, depending on who it was that ran in the last provincial campaign, we had dribs and drabs of revelation.

This particular bill wants to punish individuals who would dare collectively to oppose the direction the government is taking on any of a number of concerns. Now, you might think: well, this is sour grapes; why didn't the members of the trades put more money into the individual campaigns of the opposition? That is not the point. For example, if you take a look at my campaign finances, you are not going to find any significant donations from any collective group. What you will find is a hundred dollars here, \$200 there, \$50, \$10 from individuals who felt that it was important to have a

social conscience in this province. Obviously, there was a collective desire on the parts of the constituents who contributed to change the government.

Bill 205 is all about control. The government almost successfully received empathy in the last election because the Premier was portrayed in ads that were of a mocking nature. If anything the \$2 million worth of ads at that time backfired. However, the fact that they didn't succeed was not enough. This Bill 205 is there to hit them with another hammer to further eliminate their opportunity to have a collective voice at a key time in Alberta's political undertakings.

We have seen in this province the lowest voter turnout in Canadian history in our last election, whereby only 41 per cent of eligible voters chose to participate. Of those 41 per cent a total of 21 per cent of eligible voters chose the current government. Voters are never wrong. They, through their freedom of choice, elected 72 members to this House; thus, the government is formed. What the individuals are worried about that they need to exercise even further power I don't understand. This government has had a rather easy ride when you look at the last 40 years.

The Speaker: I have to remind the hon. member that this is private members' day. This is a private member's bill. It's private members' day and a private member's bill.

Mr. Chase: Yes. I very much appreciate that qualification, Mr. Speaker. The private member in this case comes as one of the 72 members that was elected on March 3, 2008. What the member in proposing Bill 205, the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure (Third Party Advertising) Amendment Act, 2009, is putting forward is the idea of limiting the opportunities of collective organizations to speak with a collective voice. It is more example of the divide and conquer attitude which we have seen in recent times.

Peter Lougheed was a builder. He built schools. He built hospitals. He had a vision. Unfortunately, when he left, that vision left with him. Bill 205 is not about democracy. It is not about providing the public with a voice. It is not about allowing a collective cry to be raised. It's about stifling the opportunity to speak.

I appreciate, Mr. Speaker, the opportunity to debate Bill 205, the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure (Third Party Advertising) Amendment Act, 2009. As I say, I see it as a regressive bill. As opposed to promoting free speech, I see it attempting to limit it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to join the debate today on Bill 205, the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure (Third Party Advertising) Amendment Act, 2009. I particularly appreciated the comments from the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere relating to freedom of speech. In that vein, this bill was composed and brought forward by him, and I'd like to commend him for presenting a timely and effective piece of legislation.

Mr. Speaker, the goals of Bill 205 are rather straightforward. First off, Bill 205 would define clearly in the legislation the concept of third parties and third-party election advertising. Essentially, third parties would be defined as any person, trade union, corporation, or organization that seeks to influence an election other than a political

party or a candidate. Likewise, third-party election advertising would be defined as political advertising that appears during an election and is placed by a third party. In addition, advertising would be any message conveyed to the general public through the use of newspapers, billboards, or through electronic media such as through television or the Internet. The definition for advertising would be standardized across the board as it would apply to political parties, to candidates, and to third-party interest groups.

4:20

Secondly, this bill proposes to establish donation limits on contributors supporting third-party election advertising accounts. Specifically, donors to third-party election advertising accounts would be limited to donations of no more than \$15,000 in a nonelection calendar year and \$30,000 in an election year. Currently the advantage of regulating political contributions at the provincial and federal levels are evident, and I feel it would benefit Albertans to extend this regulation to third-party advertising accounts. Furthermore, this Bill 205 would provide a framework of disclosure which would allow the transparency of third-party financial donation records.

The measures proposed in this bill are not only effective because of what they seek to accomplish but timely because they may help enhance the accountability by strengthening the role of the provincial Chief Electoral Officer. Now, Mr. Speaker, the provincial Chief Electoral Officer is an independent officer of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta and is responsible for ensuring the continued successful operation of provincial elections. In addition, the Chief Electoral Officer is also responsible for ensuring accountability and transparency for both political party campaigning and for advertising.

Mr. Speaker, under Bill 205 the provincial electoral officer would be given the mandate to ensure accountability of third-party advertising in the overall electoral process. An additional stipulation proposed by Bill 205, perhaps more specific towards third parties, is that all parties incurring election expenses would be required to register with the electoral officer. The advantages of this regulation are numerous. Perhaps the most advantageous aspect is the increased transparency of third parties, as I've mentioned. With this in place voters will know exactly who represents a third party and, thus, will be better educated to assess the third-party's message.

Accountability and voter information also tie directly into a clause requiring third parties to identify their election advertising account contributors, just like every one of us would in our election. Just as is the case with political parties, contributors to third-party election advertising accounts would also need to declare who is donating to their cause. Knowing who supports a third party can dramatically influence voters' perceptions, which, in turn, can help clarify their choices when casting a ballot.

Bill 205 would require that all campaign advertising bears the name of the third party that is behind the advertisement. This is already legislated for political parties, and it is intended to inform voters of the source of the advertisement. It puts everyone, Mr. Speaker, on an even keel. The reasoning behind this policy is that requiring advertisements to bear the name of the sponsor also extends a level of protection to candidates. These regulations can mitigate crude and confounding ads as they ensure that the ads cannot be distributed in anonymity. Voters would also know exactly who sponsored every advertisement, which, based on their perceptions of the sponsor group, might shape their opinions of the ad.

Another change that would enhance the accountability advocated by Bill 205 centres around the full disclosure of third-party election account spending. Currently political parties are already required to

document and report the full value of their campaign expenditure, but the same is not true for third-party groups. Full financial disclosure has the same benefit as many of the other proposed measures. As I mentioned, it promotes transparency, which, in turn, gives voters the information they need to hold governments accountable.

The last speaker, the Member for Calgary-Varsity, has made some comments, and I have to respond to a couple, Mr. Speaker. This act, Bill 205, is not aimed at unions. It applies equally to corporations and to individuals. Furthermore, unions can raise money also from their own members, which is not prohibited by this piece of legislation. Requiring third parties to disclose campaign expenditures is in essence holding all of these groups accountable, be it a union, an individual, or a corporation. Everybody is treated the same. In turn, this accountability promotes good governance and good decision-making. Informed voters are the foundation of our province. To this end, providing voters with clear information is an essential component of any strong democracy.

It is an advantage for third parties to foster accountability within their organizations, and that is why, Mr. Speaker, I am strongly in support of Bill 205 and the role it plays in strengthening the accountability in our provincial elections. I must again give credit to the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere because Bill 205 actively reflects the growing importance of third parties and enhances their role in the electoral process. Accordingly, I will be voting in favour of Bill 205, and I strongly encourage all hon. members to join me in supporting this initiative.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to be able to rise to engage in this interesting debate, where I think people have different positions for the same reasons and the same positions for different reasons. It's all very kind of confusing to me in many ways. At the outset, I guess, I will probably surprise members opposite by saying that we will be voting in favour of this bill.

Mr. Liepert: That's because the dollars didn't go to you.

Ms Notley: Well, that may be true. They don't typically come to us, but that's part of the bigger issue. The issue here is that if there is any concern around this bill, it is that it does not go far enough.

I guess I will start with the statements made by the very last speaker, the Member for Calgary-Egmont, in that I would rather not see us enshrine and crystallize and promote the role of wealthy third parties in our electoral system regardless of which side of the spectrum they occupy. I think that historically the role of those third parties in most political systems, certainly outside of Alberta and also in the U.S., has resulted in some gross distortions of what has happened in the legislative process afterwards. In fact, what we do here is we represent individual voters and we represent the collective interests of individual voters, and the best way to do that is for us to communicate with and participate with individual voters in as open and transparent a way as possible.

This bill goes a certain measure in this regard because at least it opens the door to look inside these third-party organizations and to maintain some level of accountability for their financing as they engage in the electoral debate and participation and, ultimately, extensive advertising. So we're at least able to see who's funding these groups, how much money is going to these groups, and where that money comes from, and we're able to a very small amount limit it although not to a large amount.

These third parties, however, don't act like political parties, so you can't necessarily join one of these third parties. As a citizen you can't join the party and engage in an open, transparent process to influence how that third party might ultimately choose to spend its money, and that's different from how political parties function. That's why I separate out political parties and suggest that they should be the primary vehicle for people's participation. These rules tend to as well exclude charitable organizations. I understand the reason for that. Because of tax reasons they can't engage in this kind of thing. I don't agree with that, but that is, unfortunately, the way it is. Again, there's a certain profile of people that become active in those groups, and those folks don't get to participate in that more transparent debate either.

What we end up with then is we have third-party organizations that may or may not have a great deal of money – mostly ones that engage in this do – and now we have a little bit of insight into what it is they're doing. Most other jurisdictions have chosen to go a completely different direction. The federal government, B.C., Manitoba, Quebec have chosen to go in the direction of banning third-party advertisement, and that doesn't matter whether you're talking about union groups or whether you're talking about the National Citizens' Coalition.

Speaking as somebody on the left of the spectrum, somebody who typically supports the objectives of the labour movement probably as much or more than anyone else in the House, I can tell you that historically across the country what has happened is that it has been significant lobby organizations that oppose those very objectives who spend great deals of money to impact the political debate through advertising. So it does tend to be, actually, those on the right side of the spectrum who have in the past been able to utilize the third-party mechanism as a way of influencing political debate during an election.

In my view, that is not helpful to the democratic process. In my view, people should be able to engage in politics, and it should not become a question of being able to buy votes, buy opinion, buy advertising space. Frankly, in Alberta we should have a much more comprehensive set of rules around our own election financing as candidates, as members of political parties, we should have much more substantial limits on how much we can spend as political parties, and we should have much more substantial rules on the maximum donation that we can receive, all of that designed to ensure it is the individual voter whose activity and whose engagement ultimately makes the day one way or the other at the end of the process and that it's not one person or a group of 20 people with \$15,000 each who can decide a particular campaign in a particular riding.

4:30

Again, in most other jurisdictions we have much more significant limitations on election funding than we do in Alberta. That's where I, obviously, part ways with my colleagues because although this starts to apply the ever so lightly touched rules that we ourselves have to operate under to these third parties, it doesn't go anywhere near far enough. It should, frankly, ban third-party engagement altogether. It should then go hand in hand with the next step of very significantly limiting the way in which people who have the capacity to engage in the electoral process through the expenditure of money can impact that electoral process in a way that is different from those who would engage in it through the use of their time and their commitment and their ability to talk to other voters one-on-one.

That is how our elections should be decided. They shouldn't be bought. They shouldn't be bought by the governing party, they shouldn't be bought by opposition parties, and they shouldn't be

bought by third parties. They should be won and lost by, heaven forbid that I suggest it, the merits of your ideas and each party's ability on a level playing field to engage voters. That's what it should look like. I know I sound very naive, but it's been done in other provinces, and there's no reason why it shouldn't be done here.

We all know that one particular political party in this province outspends the other parties about 4 to 1, in some cases more than that, and I don't think that makes for a healthy democratic system. Certainly, we know that we have the most unhealthy democratic system in the country when it comes to the level of voter participation, so we need to think about what changes we can make, and part of that process, I think, is leveling the playing field and giving the right back to individual citizens to make a difference in how elections turn out rather than people with the biggest chequebooks.

That's our position on this. This bill, needless to say, doesn't go anywhere close to where I would like it to go but at least opens the door somewhat so that people can have the ever so slightest idea what other third parties are out there engaging in the effort to influence where voters end up on election day. That is a very, very tentative and small first step towards a much larger journey that I think we need to take if we are going to bring, really, quality once again into our electoral system.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Berger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak to Bill 205, the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure (Third Party Advertising) Amendment Act, 2009, brought forward by the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, and I want to thank him for this effort.

This bill is designed to clarify rules around third-party spending on political advertising during election campaigns. Some of this comes from the way in which this bill clearly defines what constitutes political advertising as well as who would be considered third-party sponsors and eligible donors. When coupled with the rules that would regulate contributions, we can see how Bill 205 would create a consistent, transparent, and fair mechanism that enhances free speech in Alberta. To a large extent this is because it reduces the ability of wealthy third parties or political parties to dominate the media and, therefore, the political discussion. In this way it not only leaves the door open for more ideas but also enables Albertans to participate in more direct ways by allowing them to support third parties that closely reflect their particular views and sensibilities.

Mr. Speaker, part of this bill's strength lies in the way it has been designed. It is crafted in such a way that it is comprehensive but at the same time targeted. In other words, it does not overreach but simply identifies a need and addresses it through directed and measured action.

More and more we are seeing other jurisdictions deal with the issues around money, influence, and political advertising and its effects on the greater political dialogue. One of the most recent and possibly most well known of these can be found in our neighbour to the south, the United States. On March 27, 2002, the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act, perhaps better known as the McCain-Feingold act, was signed into law, bringing with it a number of substantial and technical changes to American campaign finance legislation. Ultimately, it was directed at restoring the credibility and effectiveness of what some suggested was an American federal electoral system unduly influenced by contributions from wealthy third parties.

In order to achieve this objective, the act is based on two related key elements. The first includes provisions which restrict and in

some cases ban the receipt, solicitation, and use of nonfederal funds, referred to as soft money. This ban has met with considerable success due to the way in which it has managed to steer parties and elected officials away from soliciting large and in some cases unlimited donations from corporation, unions, and individuals. As well, parties themselves have increasingly taken up a more active role in the financing of presidential and congressional elections.

The other important element in McCain-Feingold, Mr. Speaker, was directed at restricting the influence of certain third parties by prohibiting labour organizations and corporations from financing electioneering communications, often referred to as issue ads. From a more technical standpoint the legislation defines this electioneering communication as any broadcast, cable, or satellite communication that fulfills each of the following conditions: first, the communication refers to a clearly identified candidate for federal office; second, it is publicly distributed shortly before an election for the office that that candidate is seeking; and finally, the communication is targeted to the relevant electorate.

There are some exceptions, however. This definition would not include communication that may appear within news stories and editorials or as part of a candidate debate or forum.

In addition, McCain-Feingold specifies who can make electioneering communications. It includes individuals, political committees, certain unincorporated organizations, and membership organizations, all of which require that they do not use corporate or labour funds to do so. There are additional rules and regulations that require those who do finance such communications to file disclosure reports. Ultimately, Mr. Speaker, there is general agreement in the United States that these measures have gone a long way to bring greater transparency and clarity to political communications.

However, McCain-Feingold has not been without its critics. Indeed, there are those who question perhaps not its intent but its reach. Some suggest that it actually works to suppress free speech while others claim that McCain-Feingold acts as a tool of censorship. However, this argument is largely theoretical and with little convincing qualitative or quantitative evidence to support it. When we look at relevant indicators such as the amount of dollars spent and the range of diversity of views within advertising, by all accounts McCain-Feingold has done nothing to limit or damage the operation of free speech. In fact, the way in which it has focused on providing better transparency and clarity around the rules of electioneering communications of third parties has allowed for greater access by some of those previously excluded. This is a celebration of free speech, not a silencer.

4:40

In the end it is fair to say that Bill 205 addresses the same kinds of challenges as McCain-Feingold. Certainly, our respective jurisdictions are different, and perhaps the scope of these challenges is deeper in the United States if for no other reason than its relative size, but the goal is the same. Ensuring the ability of voters and citizens to participate in their democratic system is always at the forefront of what governments do directly or indirectly, and the important values of free speech and equality are something this government has always been committed to upholding. I believe that Bill 205 would enhance these efforts and allow all Albertans to continue to be a part of the political dialogue. I therefore support its passage and encourage all other members to do the same.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there additional speakers? The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising to speak against Bill 205. This bill, I strongly believe, arose from the ad which was run in the last election, the Albertans for Change ad campaign, for which some unions claim they spent \$2 million. That was on the no plan. This is where it came from, I believe. This bill does nothing but suppress freedom of speech during elections. I think that was a great ad. It brought lots of issues to the forefront. It was only strengthening the democratic process by bringing all the issues to the forefront. That is the best way, I think, to keep the electoral process strong in a way so that during an election, you know, Albertans can decide what is best for the province and what is best for all the electors. This bill does nothing more than suppress that freedom of speech.

Also, the B.C. government brought in a similar kind of bill, which was challenged in the courts. The government even conceded, you know, that freedom of speech was infringed on by that bill. Under the Charter of Rights I think that this bill is like opening a can of worms. It will be coming up for challenge if we pass this bill. This is nothing but, I think, problems later on, even after the bill is passed. I don't think that we should be restricting third-party advertising during elections. Everybody should have the right of free speech, and this is free speech during elections to bring all of the issues to the forefront. That's what was done during the Albertans for Change ad campaign. That brought lots of issues to the forefront. It was not an attack on anybody personally but an attack on the record of the government. Although all Albertans were made aware of the ad campaign, we know what kind of effect it had on Albertans. It brought the issues to the forefront.

Even the B.C. government lost that in the courts. The law was challenged, and the judge did not go with the government's vision on that. I strongly believe that we don't need this new law through Bill 205 because this is going to suppress the freedom of lots of Albertans. For those reasons I'm not supporting this bill. It's suppressing freedom of speech.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Other participants? The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will be brief. I just want to get a couple of points on the record about this particular bill, Bill 205, the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure (Third Party Advertising) Amendment Act, 2009. There's been some talk about how this will bring transparency and clarity to the issue of third-party advertising by requiring those advertisers to register with the Chief Electoral Officer in advance of any advertising campaign and mandate that they reveal where their money comes from and the way that it is spent and put some restrictions on the amount of money that any one person or organization can donate in a nonelection year or in an election year and so on and so forth and like that, which is all well and good except that there seems to be a fair amount of transparency and clarity, even if it is after the fact, around who the Albertans for Change were in the ad campaign that certainly seems to have sparked the need for this bill.

I mean, it is a private member's bill, Mr. Speaker, although the Premier mused not long after the last election that maybe we have to bring in some election reform to speak to this issue because the governing party was clearly upset with the no-plan sound bite and the no-plan campaign, although it clearly didn't do them any harm. It may in fact have done them some good. There may have been some blowback that got a few more of them elected than otherwise would have been the case. There's no secret, as I understand it, Mr. Speaker, as to who this Albertans for Change third-party association was or whom it included. It included the AFL, the building trades,

the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees, the Health Sciences Association, and the United Nurses of Alberta. I think that's well known.

So I'm not really sure that there's a particularly crying, pressing need for this transparency and clarity that the government seems to be situationally concerned about. When they see a benefit to themselves, they're all for transparency and clarity, and when they see that transparency and clarity might reveal a little bit more about their operations than they would like to, well, then they're not nearly as eager to do that sort of thing. I question the need for this. It's not exactly a huge problem, either an acute or chronic problem, third-party advertising in Alberta elections. I suppose it might become so, but it hasn't become so yet, in my view.

I think my colleague from Calgary-McCall referenced the court challenge in British Columbia. You know, I would always urge that before we bring forward legislation in this House and approve it, we be sensitive to whether we are needlessly courting the possibility of a court challenge.

The last point that I want to make, Mr. Speaker, is basically this, and it goes to the participation in debate by the Member for Livingstone-Macleod, who raised the McCain-Feingold bill in the United States. Now, that's a very interesting concept and one that might very well apply to legislation like this if the government is not bringing it forward as government business but if it's to go forward in this House as private business. I've often talked about how we should rearrange things legislatively and procedurally so that there is more time for private business and more opportunity for those of us of any party who are not actually part of the government, that being the Premier and cabinet, to bring forward legislation, hopefully good, onto the floor of this House, work with members from all parties, negotiate our way through it, and make good law on the floor of the House much like they often do in state Legislatures, in the U.S. House of Representatives, and the U.S. Senate as well.

4:50

This brings us back to McCain-Feingold. McCain is a Republican, Feingold is a Democrat, and they worked together in a bipartisan way on the legislation that the Member for Livingstone-Macleod references. You know, I think I would have an easier time with this because, for one thing, I would have a sense that there are fewer axes, perhaps, being ground on the part of any individuals or any parties if we worked together collaboratively on a piece of legislation like this. Rather than one private member representing one party bringing it forward, I'd be much more inclined to support legislation like this or to give it some serious consideration if it was brought forward collaboratively by a Conservative and a Liberal and a New Democrat.

That's an approach we don't see in this House. In fact, we might even have to change the standing orders – I'm not sure, Mr. Speaker – in order to allow that to happen. But in legislation like this, where we are seeking to put limits and restrictions on the ability of third parties to enter the campaign, perhaps for the right reasons, perhaps for the wrong reasons, I'd be a whole lot more comfortable to see that kind of bill come forward with a Conservative and a Liberal and a New Democrat sponsor because, if for no other reason, then that allows the third parties who might be impacted by such legislation to hold all parties to account for having had private members who brought that legislation forward.

I think that would be fairer. I think that would get to better legislation. I think I might be able to support that. But, Mr. Speaker, I can't support this particular bill, and I will be voting against it at the appropriate time.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there additional speakers, or should I call on the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere to close the debate?

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to all the members who have participated in the debate on this bill. In closing, I would just like to highlight and remind the members that this legislation applies to everybody. It applies to individuals, it applies to corporations, unions, organizations, everybody equally. That is important.

It also treats them the same as political parties. We want to try to put third parties and political parties, with regard to election advertising, on the same playing field, and that's what this does. It increases transparency and accountability, levels the playing field, and it respects the fundamental principles of democracy that have been talked about today.

With that, I close the debate.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:54 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

For the motion:

Anderson	Fawcett	Morton
Berger	Forsyth	Notley
Calahasen	Groeneveld	Oberle
Campbell	Horne	Olson
Cao	Jablonski	Renner
Dallas	Knight	Rogers
DeLong	Leskiw	Tarchuk
Denis	Liepert	Weadick
Drysdale	Marz	Webber
Elniski	McQueen	Woo-Paw

Against the motion:

Chase	Pastoor	Taylor
Kang		

Totals:	For – 30	Against – 4
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[Motion carried; Bill 205 read a second time]

Motions Other than Government Motions

The Speaker: Clerk, just hold the clock for a second, please. We've now gone six minutes past the hour of 5 o'clock. Our standing orders indicate that at 5 o'clock sharp motions must be called. However, they're not to be called if, in fact, we have the procedure we've just gone through, a division. So we will start the time allocation for this motion now at six and a half minutes past the hour of 5 o'clock.

Please proceed, hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Aboriginal History and Culture Month

507. Ms Calahasen moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to recognize the month of June as aboriginal history and culture month in Alberta.

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a great honour to sponsor Motion 507. Culture is an essential ingredient in a well-

lived life. Culture is that which connects individuals to their communities, to their provinces, to their nations, and nations to the world. Culture describes who people are, what they value, what their customs are, how they spend their time, how they think about and treat each other, and, of course, where they come from. History determines our future and can be a lesson for future generations. The *Oxford* dictionary identifies it as a whole series of past events connected with someone or something or, as my elders described it to me in Cree, a forum of our ancestors talking to us of past activities, trials, and tribulations. It can provide a way to remember your good deeds and, yes, sacrifices our people have made during difficult times.

As an example, over 200 years ago many First Nations, Métis, and Inuit cultures existed in this country with many aboriginal nations with their own rules, mores, laws, customs, and traditions. History shows that much of the original aboriginal lifestyles has disappeared, and many aboriginal nations and cultures were decimated, indigenous languages lost, kinship relationships confused, and, yes, illnesses new to the original peoples were rampant.

Rare has it been for the aboriginal community to tell its story and its history, rarer yet to openly practise its faith. That is why this motion is being put forward to help promote and acknowledge First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples' culture and historical contributions in this province, because, Mr. Speaker, it is this province which has done many positive things for and with aboriginal Albertans.

As an example, Alberta was first to settle the land claims quickly and fairly. Alberta was first to have the native education policy recognizing the history of the people by using elders and aboriginal historians, and their work was then taught in the schools. The recognition of the language development of the many aboriginal nations in this province was also done. The establishment of the aboriginal health strategy; the developing of the aboriginal policy framework and the aboriginal policy initiative; establishing traditional land-use studies, mapping where the aboriginal peoples lived and where they practised their culture; the economic development partnerships that have been developed; completing more land claims; signing between our present Premier and the Minister of Aboriginal Relations with the grand chiefs for an MOU; the Métis settlements agreement signed and finally to be completed; the Métis nation framework to be implemented: I could go on, Mr. Speaker, but this government has a history of doing the right thing because we've had and continue to have great leaders.

The creation of an aboriginal history and culture month would be an opportunity for Albertans to learn about the experiences of aboriginal Canadians and the vital role this community has played throughout our shared history. The numerous generations of aboriginal peoples who have made the prairie provinces their home for thousands of years have a multifaceted and rich history. As an example, I'm of Cree descent. We have a lot of Métis who are also Métis-Cree. We also have Bloods. We also have Blackfoot people, and we have Inuit people. We also have people of the Chipewyan Nation. We have many, many different nations in this province. Approximately 188,000 people in Alberta identified themselves as aboriginal during the 2006 Canadian census. There are 46 First Nations and eight Métis settlements in Alberta with many different cultures and languages.

5:10

To recognize June as a commemorative month would help these 188,000 people and other Albertans in so many ways. First, the acknowledgement of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples' historical contribution to this province and this country will be elevated. As well, their own histories could be written and preserved

so that others could experience what they have. Second, acknowledgement of aboriginal peoples' culture would give the aboriginal community the ability to further showcase their cultural practices. Third, it would allow the numerous languages that we do have, as I described, to flourish.

Today I ask all members of this Assembly to support June as aboriginal history and culture month as my elders had so wished. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for West Yellowhead, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I rise in support of Motion 507, the idea of making June the aboriginal history and culture month in Alberta. As has previously been noted, June 21 is already National Aboriginal Day in Canada, so we would be in sort of a lockstep circumstance with celebrating First Nations achievements and culture.

I think that if there is such a thing as a second life, then at some point in a previous life I was connected with a First Nations background. Since a child I have been absolutely fascinated with First Nations culture, First Nations history. As a young child I was an avid reader and read anything I could get my hands on with regard to First Nations. Being a child of the late '40s and early '50s, the portrayal of First Nations was not very positive in the movies. Despite that portrayal, when we as young children played cowboys and Indians, I was always on the Indian side, and my side always won. Maybe it was somewhat revisionist history. I thought that the First Nations showed considerably more creativity and wisdom, both environmentally and in the way they preserved their culture, than the chaps with the white hats and the bandanas, who rode around on their horses, basically, with one single shot able to knock five First Nations people off their horses.

I also noted that in the '50s there were an awful lot of Mediterranean Apaches employed in Hollywood. It's only been recently that we have seen a true portrayal of First Nations and their actual stories in history.

It's very important that we recognize when we move from sort of history and that time period to the modern day that First Nations are the fastest growing segment of the population. The First Nations offer a tremendous contribution, not only to our western provinces and across Canada, but First Nations aboriginals offer a terrific lesson on life and the need to preserve Mother Earth, as the term is so often used. It's a lesson that we need to learn.

There are also tremendous lessons with regard to coexistence and also tremendous lessons with regard to how elders are treated and respected. First Nations had a terrific respect for individuals who were viewed as suffering. Potentially, we would view them as suffering from mental illness. These people in First Nations were regarded as having been specially touched, and as such they were treated. It was thought that some of these individuals had vision beyond that of the ordinary person.

Part of First Nations background is the idea of a spirit animal or a spirit bird, and fasting was an important part of First Nations celebrations regardless of the tribe. This was called a vision quest, and the idea was that by depriving yourself of sleep and sustenance, if you waited long enough, your spirit animal or spirit bird would come to you with a message, and that message would have important ramifications not only for your own personal survival but for that of the tribe of which you were a member. There was also a thought that as you progressed in life, it was appropriate that your name changed based on the accomplishments you made. So while you

might have started out with a particular name, as you matured and as your accomplishments were noted, your name would change numerous times within the process.

One of the most significant First Nations encounters that I personally had was as a teacher when Douglas Cardinal, Alberta's very famous architect, spoke at a teachers' convention in Calgary. As I say, I already had a strong sense and appreciation of First Nations history, particularly in what we would refer to as the Victorian time period, but my enjoyment was prior to 1850, while there was still buffalo and sufficient game and the majority of western First Nations were nomads and followed the game.

At the teachers' convention I asked Douglas Cardinal what sort of First Nations wisdom, what philosophies inspired him in his architectural creations. He related the story of a church he designed in New Mexico. He had built the walls of the church without predetermining what the roof would look like, and as he was contemplating his work, he went out into the wilderness. He saw in a bush a spider's web, and that gave him the idea of the cross-cabing from which the roof was suspended.

I asked him: who would you suggest in terms of philosophers or elders that I could potentially research or draw inspiration from? He talked about a Sioux elder by the name of Black Elk. Black Elk was revered by the Sioux Nation as a man of great wisdom. Following having read *The Sacred Pipe*, Black Elk's first book, I was drawn to other pieces of literature by First Nations authors such as Lame Deer. One of the books, the historical references that I particularly enjoyed that talked about shamanism and spiritualism was entitled *Mitakuye Oyasin*, which translated from Sioux simply means "we are all related."

It's that relationship that we share that makes Motion 507 particularly important. We have benefited from our contact with the First Nations. I wouldn't say that it was necessarily a reciprocal agreement because what we offered back, such as blankets covered with small pox, were some of the examples of genocide that occurred in early Canadian history. Canadian history may not appear to have been nearly as violent as what we saw below the Medicine Line in the United States, but we have our share of history which is hardly positive.

5:20

Recently Stephen Harper, our Prime Minister and our Calgary-based representative, made an apology to First Nations about the effects of residential schools, which were not simply limited to the first generation that was taken from their families but affected subsequent generations. At some point people will say, "Well, we've got to get on with it. We've got to stop apologizing and work with First Nations." But for us to progress further, we need to recognize beyond just a simple apology that what we did was a form of cultural genocide. First Nations individuals were not allowed to speak their language. They were not allowed to wear their hair in the traditional manner. They were not allowed to wear traditional clothing . . . [Mr. Chase's speaking time expired]

The Speaker: Hon. members, I have a long list of speakers this afternoon, and we have a very, very short amount of time. I'd encourage brevity, and I'll try and move everyone in.

Just to bring you up to date on some developing news, mid-afternoon today the government of Nova Scotia presented its budget. Shortly thereafter the government was defeated on a bill that would have allowed it to miss a debt payment. So the Premier of Nova Scotia must now meet with the Lieutenant Governor of Nova Scotia, and by all likelihood that province will be in election mode.

The hon. Member for West Yellowhead, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise in support of Motion 507, Alberta's Aboriginal History and Culture Month, as sponsored by my colleague from Lesser Slave Lake. The purpose of Motion 507 is to urge the government to recognize June as the month during which aboriginal history and culture would be officially recognized and celebrated. The commemorative month would also signify our province's acknowledgement of aboriginal peoples' present and historical contributions. This motion would also be an opportunity to demonstrate the Alberta government's respect for aboriginal history and culture and to further its commitment to encouraging aboriginal people to make a positive difference in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to read a few passages from the book *People & Peaks of Willmore Wilderness Park: 1800s to mid-1900s*. It's a book that was written in my riding.

The mountain men and women of the Mt. Robson, Jasper, Willmore and Kakwa areas had, and still have, exceptional abilities and knowledge. If one were to liken their aptitude in today's education system standards, they would be recognized with a PhD in bush knowledge. These trail people exercised refined skills in survival, tracking, hunting, horsemanship, trapping and fishing. An example of this is when one aboriginal elder showed me how to make a candle out of lard and a tea towel, when the candle supply was depleted. This simple technique afforded our camp two nights of light, which was superior to the candles we had previously been using. Survival in remote places took ingenuity and common sense . . .

In the early 1800s, the white man wanted to find natural corridors through the Canadian Rockies – so the search began. The Indians had been travelling through these natural passageways for generations. One of the first attempts to find a practical route to the Pacific Ocean was through what is now called Howse Pass. Although David Thompson has been credited with the first crossing of this Pass in 1807, his employer, the North West Company, had sent an advance party over the pass in 1806. This trail-blazing trip was made by Jacques (Jacco) Findlay, a man named MacMaster, and two others. They drew a sketch of their route, and upon their return to Rocky Mountain House, presented it to Thompson. This helped to guide Thompson on his first passage in 1807, during which he officially mapped the area. However, the pass was named after Joseph Howse, even though it was not until 1809 that he crossed for his employer, the Hudson's Bay Company . . .

The first reports of Iroquois in the Athabasca Valley were recorded in 1814, resulting in their bloodlines running deep in the veins of the area's indigenous people. The Wanyandies were some of the first Iroquois to come west. In fact, Vincent (Basa) Wanyandie landed a job with Henry John Moberly, a Hudson's Bay Factor at Jasper House. He was born in 1858 and was the son of Jean Baptiste Wanyandie . . . and the grandson of fur trader, Ignace Wanyandie, one of the first Iroquois who guided the first explorers west . . .

Some of the indigenous families, like the present-day Wanyandies, have striking features of the Iroquois. "Many of them stand over six feet, broad-shouldered and erect, big men with aquiline noses and strong features; while the Cree are short in stature, with round faces and snub noses. The Iroquois who came west were select men." The Rocky Mountain People, called the Aseniwuche Winewak, have long acknowledged their family ties with the Iroquois, Cree, Beaver, and Stoney.

Today such names as the Wanyandies, Joachims, Moberlys, Vinsons, Findlays, and Groats are still familiar names up and down the eastern slopes and continue to work and live off the land. Of note, the Findlay name, that is synonymous with the fur trade in and around Jasper and now Grande Cache, traces its Caucasian roots back to the royalty in Scotland.

Mr. Speaker, the Métis and the AWN people play an important role in the workings of West Yellowhead as they continue to teach

the traditional ways to the people and to the youth as they try to keep their languages and cultures alive. The local Métis hold summer camps each year where they bring as many as 50 youth out into the bush on horseback, getting them away from Xboxes, TVs, and cellphones, to continue the traditional ways such as cooking gopher, which is a delicacy among the Cree.

On July 25, 2009, the Métis of Grande Cache will embark on a 14-day horse trip with 25 of their youth from Grande Cache to Jasper, following the routes taken by their forefathers, to celebrate a hundred years since this forced migration from Jasper to the valleys and peaks of the Grande Cache area.

We're all proud of our heritage, and it would be wrong for us to not acknowledge, identify, and celebrate the culture and accomplishments of aboriginal people to the opening up of this great country, this province, and, in particular, my riding of West Yellowhead.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the Minister of Aboriginal Relations, followed by the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to be able to rise in support of this motion to declare June aboriginal history month. It's my understanding that Saskatchewan has officially recognized aboriginal history month in June in both 2007 and 2008, yet it is not recognized every year quite as yet. In 2007 Jean Crowder, the NDP MP for Nanaimo-Cowichan, put forward a private member's motion to have June recognized as aboriginal history month, but the motion was unfortunately never debated.

Nonetheless, the objective which is sought here is one which I think all members of the House can agree on. Promotion of aboriginal history and culture is vital to a full understanding of what it means to be Albertan and Canadian. Aboriginal people knew this land and not only survived but often thrived here for thousands of years before the arrival of any Europeans. Those early European visitors required the help of aboriginals to survive. The early fur trade succeeded because of the skills of the aboriginal people and the trade networks that aboriginal people helped to develop.

Many years ago I had the pleasure of working at the historic site at historic Fort Dunvegan and often ran numbers of tours of people through that Alberta site and would have the opportunity to speak in part about the significant role played by our aboriginal people, including the Beaver Indians, when the fur traders were just beginning to make their way up through the Peace River.

Some of the most exciting places to visit in Alberta are already places associated with aboriginal history and culture. Writing-On-Stone national historic site, a provincial park since 1957, protects the largest concentration of North American Plains rock art. The preserve is accessed by guided tours only which allow park visitors to view over 50 rock art sites and enjoy many interpretive programs. Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump, of course, is the UNESCO world heritage site, and it's one of the world's oldest, largest, and best preserved buffalo jumps, bearing witness to the custom practised by North American Plains natives for nearly 6,000 years. The Ewan Moberly Homestead, I believe already mentioned, is in Jasper national park.

All Albertans are enriched by the role that aboriginal societies have played in the development of our province. It is really important that as we all, I suspect, vote to support this motion, we not let our celebration and desire to promote and appreciate aboriginal culture gloss over our ongoing need to respond to the needs of our aboriginal people with more justice than perhaps we have thus far. We have the ongoing inability to complete the

negotiation of a fair Métis harvesting agreement. We have the ongoing concerns raised by aboriginal communities living downstream from the Fort McMurray area. We have what is probably one of the most tragic and embarrassing international situations with respect to the status of the Lubicon and our government's inability to resolve those issues.

5:30

None of these issues should be forgotten by us. But ultimately as our First Nations people move forward, while they may need our support in certain areas with respect to the kinds of decisions I've just discussed, it is they who will lead their own journey forward, and it is through this kind of process, where we acknowledge and celebrate aboriginal culture and aboriginal history, that we will be able to help provide the vehicle through which our aboriginal brothers and sisters will be able to move forward to provide and create many, many more centuries of history for all Albertans.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Hon. members, I have eight speakers on my list. If you spoke two to three minutes, we'd get you all in.

The hon. Minister of Aboriginal Relations, followed by the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I also want to say a sincere thank you to the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake, who championed this motion thus far and, hopefully, will champion it through to conclusion with support from all members of the House.

Mr. Speaker, I'll be brief in my comments. I simply want to indicate that I'm very supportive of this particular motion. We've already heard that the single fastest growing population by cultural identity, by group, is in fact the aboriginal population. We're very proud of the 225,000 aboriginal people in Alberta who self-identify as either First Nation, Métis, or Inuit. There are probably more that we could add to that number. Certainly, we'll be adding a lot more in the coming years.

This provides us with some great opportunities in so many areas. One of the greatest opportunities is in the area of economic development and in job training and skills training. I know that that is being pursued very aggressively. A motion such as this one, that officially serves to have the Assembly recognize the month of June as aboriginal history and culture month, merits our serious attention. Anything, in my view, that helps to promote the positive sides of aboriginals and the aboriginal way of life, that particular focus, is something that I am very much in favour of.

We're doing some of this promotion ourselves to help out on the education front, to help out on the economic development front, certainly to help out on the resource management and land management front. In fact, all of those issues, Mr. Speaker, will be part of the focus we're putting on aboriginal things, coincidentally, in the month of June with our international symposium, Gathering for Success. It'll be hosted in the lovely constituency of Banff-Cochrane on June 28, 29, and 30. A number of our colleagues will be there as well.

The other point I want to mention quickly, Mr. Speaker, is some of the new and exciting things that have been alluded to by the Member for Lesser Slave Lake such as the protocol agreement with First Nations in Alberta, such as our three-year interim agreement with the Métis settlements, such as our seven-year agreement that's just recently been signed with the Métis Nation of Alberta, and, of

course, the first-ever aboriginal education summit that occurred between ministers of education, ministers of advanced education, and all ministers of aboriginal relations or aboriginal affairs from right across Canada, which was hosted in Saskatoon at the end of February.

There are many things that we can learn from aboriginal people, from their way of life, from their rich and diverse culture. Having a month dedicated to that will go a long way to helping it be fulfilled. I think it also bears mention, Mr. Speaker, that my ministry is proud to provide about \$30,000 in annual funding for the support of National Aboriginal Day, which is traditionally held on the weekend of June 21. We're going to be hosting some events in that regard ourselves. We're looking forward to that.

My final couple of points are these. Mr. Speaker, as you know, the Education ministry a few years ago brought in aboriginal studies 10, aboriginal studies 20, aboriginal studies 30. I was very privileged to be the Minister of Education at that time. I'm happy to tell you that in just a few years of it being there, children in our schools today are learning more about aboriginal business here in the province of Alberta than ever before.

When I grew up, we knew a lot more about the Treaty of Versailles, which came about at the end of World War I in 1919, about the Treaties of Rome, which came about in 1958, all about the European Economic Community, and so on than did we learn, or did I ever know, about Treaty 6 or Treaty 7 or Treaty 8, which are less than an hour or two, three, four hours' drive from the city in which I live. So anything that helps focus on that is definitely worth supporting.

I'll just close by saying that I hope other members of the Assembly will also support this motion, and I thank the aboriginal community for supporting this and for supporting some of the many initiatives that we're bringing forward to indeed build more positive, more productive relationships with and for Métis, First Nation, and Inuit cultures that thrive here in the province of Alberta.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, then Edmonton-Meadowlark, then Calgary-Mackay.

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today to support Motion 507 on aboriginal culture and history month. I would like to commend the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake for bringing this motion forward because it's such an important topic for many Albertans. Motion 507 urges the government of Alberta to recognize June as the aboriginal history and culture month. I believe this is important to recognize the aboriginal community for its influential role it has played in our provincial history. This motion would be very meaningful for the people of my constituency. In Bonnyville-Cold Lake we have a large aboriginal population spread over five areas: Frog Lake, Cold Lake, Kehewin, Elizabeth settlement, and Fishing Lake settlement.

By proclaiming June as an aboriginal history and cultural month, it would help to improve the connection between our communities through the sharing of culture and traditions. This recognition would help to instill pride in aboriginal culture and ensure that traditions are passed on from generation to generation. Not only would Motion 507 improve the connection between communities, but it would help to strengthen the relationship between the aboriginal community and the government of Alberta.

June 21 has already been established as National Aboriginal Day, and Motion 507 would work to complement this. Mr. Speaker, establishing the aboriginal history and cultural month would be so

meaningful to many Albertans, especially to many in my constituency. I would ask all members to please vote in favour of Motion 507 and recognize the important role that aboriginal culture plays in this province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, then Calgary-Mackay, then Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise in support of Motion 507, which is to declare June to be aboriginal history and culture month in Alberta. I will just start with saying that I think that for us people coming from India, there's a bond there between the natives, aboriginal people, and us, and we respectfully call them tae-ke. Tae-ke is the Indian word for uncle. The uncle, you know, the older brother of dad, is called tia. So, I mean, I think the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark will agree with me that when he was driving a cab and when I was driving a cab and we had a fare from the Tsuu T'ina reserve and when he asked me, "Where did you go for a fare?" I said, "I went to pick up a tae-ke." That means, you know, I went to pick up my uncle's sons and nephews, nieces. That's the word we use respectfully, tae-ke. So that correlates to us personally.

I'm glad that the Member for Lesser Slave Lake brought in this motion to recognize all the contributions made by the aboriginal and native people in Canada since June 21 is National Aboriginal Day, which the federal government recognized in 1996. National Aboriginal Day is to give Canadians the opportunity to show their appreciation and respect to aboriginal people and to recognize the unique achievements of aboriginal people through celebration although there are lots of issues still maybe to be resolved, like Lubicon issues and other land claim issues and limitations on hunting and fishing rights.

5:40

It's an ongoing primary concern for Alberta's aboriginal people. Aboriginal people see that these issues are infringing on their ability to participate in their own culture, and I think we should be working towards solving all those issues. All too often the focus is placed on the aboriginal community surrounding their socioeconomic problems instead of their positive contributions. We should be recognizing all the positive contributions made by our native brothers and sisters. I think it is long overdue, and I urge all the members of the Assembly to support this motion. I'm in favour of it, and we're all going to support it.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Thank you, sir.

Five speakers left. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today and speak to Motion 507, aboriginal history and culture month, proposed by the Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Mr. Speaker, on several occasions I've mentioned that the majority of Albertans and Canadians, me included, have immigrated from other provinces and distant countries; if not us, then our ancestors. I'd just like to tell you a couple of stories. On my first day in Canada I arrived as a six and a half year old, and I didn't speak English. I met this young fellow whose name was Shawn Baker. He looked like me. I assumed he was from India, and I started speaking the only tongue that I knew. He looked at me in a

very peculiar fashion, and he took me to the other fellow who had the same skin complexion as I did who spoke my mother tongue. That's when I first came to learn of the aboriginal peoples of Canada.

The other story I'd like to share with you. The hon. member sitting next to me, the Member for Lesser Slave Lake: as fate would have it, my father-in-law actually taught the hon. member next to me 40 some-odd years ago as a social teacher in Peace River. His name is Mr. Singh. And this hon. member, my understanding is, is the first aboriginal woman elected in Canada, first aboriginal woman cabinet minister.

Many Canadians, Mr. Speaker, are recent immigrants encountering the beautiful seasonal prairie climate for the first time. Others have been enjoying life in Alberta for decades while more still are descendants of immigrant families who've been arriving for various reasons throughout the centuries, some in search of adventure and a new life, others escaping what are very difficult and hostile environments. No matter the category or duration of stay, the government of Alberta supports and encourages the presence of immigrants from across the world here in this country and this province.

The value of our positive contributions to Alberta's society is recognized and appreciated, but as we all should know, numerous organized communities were established here long before our arrival, before the formation of the province, and, yes, even before the influx of the European explorers, adventurers, and pioneers. In fact, the aboriginal peoples were living here and thriving here for thousands of years prior to the discovery of the so-called New World.

Alberta's First Nations have a rich and vibrant history and culture, and while relationships have been strained in the past, currently the government of Alberta and the province's First Nations enjoy a strong collaborative friendship based on mutual respect and honour. Aboriginal political culture is on display here in this building. Perhaps you've noticed that the first statue adorning the rotunda of this Legislature is that of Chief Crowfoot, leader of the Blackfoot confederation, who showed his bravery, prudence, and desire for peace by refusing to join the Northwest Rebellion in 1885.

Mr. Speaker, the government of Alberta recognizes June 21 as National Aboriginal Day. On this day all Albertans can celebrate the unique heritage and culture of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples throughout the province of Alberta. However, the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake has put forth a motion which I support wholeheartedly to designate the entire month of June for aboriginal history and culture.

This commemorative month would symbolize the province's acknowledgement of aboriginal peoples' historical, present, and future involvement in shaping Alberta's spirit. It would be a gesture of friendship between our government and our aboriginal peoples. By remembering aboriginal culture for an extended period, we can start changing misconceptions. We can develop a positive rapport and inspire our aboriginal youth, who can give whole communities new hope.

On behalf of my family, that has had the honour and privilege of landing on Canadian shores 103 years ago, I would like to thank our aboriginal peoples of Canada for the opportunity to live in the best province in the best country in the world.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Well, it's unfortunate, hon. member, that you cannot correct *Hansard*. There is no way in the world that your father-in-law taught the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake 46 years ago. If she was studying social then, that would make her a minimum of 68. I know for a fact that she's no more than a day over 37, so I'll correct it for you for the record.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, then Edmonton-Calder, then Airdrie-Chestermere.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will try to be fast. It is my pleasure to rise today to speak on Motion 507, sponsored by the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake. Aboriginal Canadians hold a distinctive place within the social, political, and cultural fabric of Canada as well as a vital role in the historic, current, and future development of our communities and nation. Aboriginal Canadians have contributed in all aspects of development in the province of Alberta, and it's anticipated they will play an even greater role in the future social and economic growth of our province.

The aboriginal communities' path of development within the broader context of the Canadian fabric hasn't been a smooth one. It has in fact been one fraught with marginalization and exclusion and overcoming trial and tribulation with individual and collective perseverance and tenacity. The impact from centuries of systemic exclusion resulted in adverse outcomes for aboriginal people in health, education, justice, employment, social participation, and economic opportunities on this continent.

We know from research of the continual omission of a people from the vast facets of society such as our books and texts, various forms of communications media, positions of leadership in institutions of power. Without acknowledgement of the existence and impact of institutionalized or systemic barriers on people, it is almost inevitable for many of the marginalized to ascribe their place and circumstances as faults of their own doing, which then leads to the acceptance and internalization of the negative attributes into their lives and their communities.

I am pleased to note that our government's response to the needs and issues of aboriginal people is taking on a more systemic approach, which is absolutely critical as the problems impacting the people are structural. We have ministries responsible for education, health, advanced education, employment, and sustainable development not only to develop specific strategies and programs to address the specific needs and issues experienced by aboriginal people but also working across ministries to better co-ordinate efforts. Our government also has a stand-alone ministry to focus efforts and development in aboriginal relations.

Mr. Speaker, the proposed motion to urge the government to recognize the month of June as Alberta's aboriginal history and culture month would expand and enhance our government's current efforts to strengthen the capacity of the aboriginal people for greater engagement and participation in the social, economic, cultural, and political life in Alberta. I believe a dedicated aboriginal history and culture month would serve to enhance pride and belonging, especially for the younger population among aboriginal Canadians, resulting from the public's increased awareness and understanding and appreciation of the participation and contribution of aboriginal people.

A greater sense of belonging and safety will lead to higher participation by aboriginal people. Their engagement with society would be more meaningful and equitable due to improved overall social relations. Society will benefit from a heightened level of social cohesion in the long run. I envision tremendous opportunities for learning, celebration, and creative developments from this month. Aboriginal history and culture month could offer opportunities for business and literary as well as arts and cultural institutions to profile the participation, integration, and contribution of aboriginal Canadians.

There's opportunity to incorporate the recognition and celebration of aboriginal entrepreneurs, literary accomplishments, visual artists,

groundbreakers, and outstanding achievement in areas of law, education, entertainment, research into the program during and around the month. These will enhance the diverse representation of the events and programs, and these events will also contribute to dispelling the misconceptions and stereotypes of our aboriginal Canadians.

The proposed aboriginal history and culture month can also serve as a platform for sharing community experiences and untold stories that would build better understanding. As an example, I have learned that when Chinese labourers were brought in to help build the Canadian railroad, they were left to die along the developing railroad when they became gravely ill or injured, and many times it was the aboriginal people who took them in and brought them back to health. I think human stories like this and historical relationships such as this are worth capturing and sharing.

Drummers from aboriginal communities and the Indian community, the Asian community, and African communities, and many others would be creating new beats and connections. I've tried this, and it's beautiful. I can see people from the aboriginal and nonaboriginal communities sharing and creating new forms of art, drama, and theatre and in the process contributing to creating a more vibrant cultural scene in Alberta and, hence, the support and participation of the arts in Alberta.

5:50

In closing, I believe the recognition of June as aboriginal history and culture month will enhance the social relations and cultural vibrancy of our province, which would benefit all Albertans of all backgrounds.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm speaking today in support of Motion 507, and I'll try and do it quickly to allow for other speakers. Our government is so proud of the cultural diversity amongst our caucus, which, I believe, truly reflects the cultural mosaic of our province.

The aboriginal peoples have a rich history in cultural traditions that are an important part of the diversity of our province. As the MLA for Drayton-Valley-Calmar I have been fortunate enough to work in close contact with many of the aboriginal people in my constituency in Hobbema and, in particular, the two bands of Ermineskin and Louis Bull. I have participated in several events and meetings in my capacity as MLA, and I must say I have learned a great deal about their way of life and their culture, and I certainly look forward to many more opportunities.

Motion 507 will give all Albertans an excellent opportunity to learn about the history and achievements of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples. It would serve to educate future generations of Albertans about the history, culture, and positive contributions made to our great province by aboriginal peoples and leaders. The recognition and celebration of the contributions aboriginal people have made to our province and nation would be an important tool in showing our support for aboriginal youth and enabling them by giving them the confidence necessary to become actively engaged in their community. This could encourage more aboriginal peoples to break forth and to consider other areas that they may not have felt they would break into for careers. In fact, in my area we have been fortunate enough to have an aboriginal leader who was also elected to the House of Commons in the 1980s, Chief Wilton Littlechild.

I believe we need to not only embrace the unique history of the aboriginal people in our province but celebrate with aboriginal people around the province and, indeed, the country and educate

future generations to overcome the challenges or obstacles aboriginal people have experienced and continue to face in our society largely as a result of ignorance.

I am in full support of this motion. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today to speak to Motion 507. Edmonton-Calder is the home to many aboriginal people, organizations, and schools, something which we're very proud of. In fact, the hon. Member for Drayton-Valley-Calmar once said, "It's all in Calder," and that seems particularly appropriate. We have the Métis Urban Housing Corporation, Métis Settlements General Council, the Métis Nation of Alberta, the Canadian Native Friendship Centre, the native elders community centre, Amiskwaciy Academy, and Prince Charles elementary school, which is in the Awasis program.

Declaring June as the aboriginal history and culture month will help us further not only the educational efforts in our constituencies but also our whole communities to teach all Albertans about the prominent role that aboriginal Albertans play in our province's rich history.

I would ask all members to please vote in favour of Motion 507 and to help promote awareness of the importance of aboriginal history and culture in Alberta. Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member, for your co-operation.

The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my sincere pleasure to rise and speak to Motion 507, Aboriginal History and Culture Month, as sponsored by my colleague the Member for Lesser Slave Lake. Motion 507 encourages the government of Alberta to recognize June as the month during which aboriginal history and culture would be officially recognized and celebrated. I would like to congratulate the hon. member for bringing this motion forward and bringing it to the attention of government.

Culture diversity is extremely important to Albertans. There are at least 188,000 aboriginal people and 46 First Nations groups in Alberta. Each of these groups boasts a different culture, language, and traditions. Mr. Speaker, aboriginal culture and values have played an important role in the development of Alberta, and aboriginals are proud people who have lived on the landscape of our province for thousands of years.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that an aboriginal history and culture month would have a number of benefits. It would help educate Albertans on the valuable role that aboriginal people have played in Canada. It would recognize that we the representatives of Albertans respect the value and contribution that aboriginal history and culture has had on Alberta, and it would demonstrate the Alberta government's commitment to encourage aboriginal people to make a positive difference.

It is for these reasons that I applaud the Member for Lesser Slave Lake for Motion 507, and I encourage all members of this House to do the same. Thank you.

The Speaker: Would additional members like to participate? The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to congratulate the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake for bringing this great motion to the Assembly, and I just want to tell of my own experience. A

few years ago I had the privilege of chairing the committee to review the Northland school district in the north. I went up there and I toured around and I visited many, many, many places there. At one particular place we were talking to a senior there, and she said to me that her priority is to protect the native, the aboriginal culture. She looked at me and said: you, young man, if you lose your Chinese culture here, you still have billions of people in China whereas if we lose it here, who else in the world do we have? I want to relate that message to all members here. It was a learning experience for me, and I support the hon. member's motion.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others, or should I call on the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake to close the debate?

Ms Calahasen: Just a short minute, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the Minister of Aboriginal Relations for coming in to speak to this

motion and for all the great work that he's been doing on the Aboriginal Relations side. I'd like to thank all my colleagues from all sides of the House for their support on this motion. I really appreciate the knowledge that they have brought to the table. Thank you very, very much. I look forward to the vote.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 507 carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, given the hour I would move that we call it 6 p.m. and adjourn until 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:57 p.m. to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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