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The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

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The 27th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, May 5, 2009

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Welcome.

Let us pray. Grant us daily awareness of the precious gift of life which has been given to us. As Members of this Legislative Assembly we dedicate our lives anew to the service of our province and our country. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is truly my pleasure today on behalf of our Premier and yourself to introduce through you to all the members of the Assembly students participating in the Forum for Young Albertans program. We are joined today by 27 students from various high schools across Alberta.

The Forum for Young Albertans is a nonpartisan political learning opportunity for senior high school students from all over the province. The program provides a wide variety of experiences for participants, including insight into the judicial system, the role of the bureaucracy, the function of interest groups, and the legislative process. While interacting with decision-makers, our leaders of tomorrow gain valuable insight into the political system in Alberta.

These students have already met with some of the members of the Assembly and will be meeting with many more throughout the week. I would ask the students and chaperones, seated in the public gallery, to rise and please accept the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to welcome students from Caernarvon elementary school in Edmonton-Castle Downs as their MLA is unable to be here today. These 60 bright young grade 6 students along with parent helpers and teachers Susanne Venaas and Bobbi-Jo Hollingsworth and teacher helper Melissa Carlson have toured our Legislature to learn a lot about our building and the provincial government. I believe they are sitting in both galleries. I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you very much.

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

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today we are fortunate to have a group of students from Horizon school in Olds. I met with them earlier, and they were very excited to go on a tour of this grand building and learn about its history. They're here this afternoon to learn how the Legislature works. We've got 10 students, and they're accompanied by six teachers/group leaders by the names of Lianne Manning, Doreen Mozak, Sarah Thompson, Marje Cheecho, Jackie Klein, and Anne Tuggle. I would ask all of them, students and leaders, to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance and Enterprise.

Ms Evans: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two groups to introduce today. The first group is a group of new employees from Finance and Enterprise who, as part of their orientation, are taking a tour of the Legislature: Jennifer Keats, Parminder Lytviak, Karen Chan, Mike Hartfield, Laurie Balfour, Carole Marson, Margaret-Anne Huynh, Gavin Hoekstra, Ronald Brochu, Tomas Nilsson, Diana L'Heureux, and Artem Barsukov. Would they please rise, and would the Assembly please give them a warm round of applause.

Mr. Speaker, we also had a real privilege today at the rural caucus at lunch to be graced with the presence of four mayors and councillors, who provided us their experience on the regional economic development authorities. With us this afternoon are Dale Barr, who is the mayor of Rimbey, who is part of Central Alberta Economic Partnership; Pamela Marriott, who is the mayor of Swan Hills, with the Grizzly Regional Economic Alliance; Jack O'Toole, councillor from Grande Prairie, Peace Region Economic Development Alliance; and Don Whittaker, councillor for the county of Vermilion River, with the Northeast Alberta Information Hub. They're seated in the public gallery. I'd ask that they rise and that you please acknowledge them here today.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour today to rise and introduce to you and through you to the hon. members of this Assembly some folks that have travelled down here from La Crête. They're a group of people that have spent countless hours working for the betterment of their community, focusing on the issue of health care delivery in that extreme remote region of northwestern Alberta. With us today are George and Eva Friesen and George and Mary Janzen. Accompanying them is Jerry Archibald, who is a consultant that they've engaged.

Mr. Speaker, they've done so much work on this project and they're so committed to their community and they're so concerned about the issue of health care that in my meeting with them today they didn't even mention highway 88 even though some of them drove down on highway 88 to get here. An oversight I'm sure, and I'll hear about it later.

I'd like to ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you Mr. Doug Drozd. Doug is a director of the Central Alberta Rural Electrification Association, and he was kind enough to buy several of us breakfast this morning. Doug, as you might guess, is not from my constituency; rather, he is expertly represented in this Assembly by yourself. I'd ask Doug to rise now and receive the traditional warm greeting of the Assembly.

Thank you.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise today to introduce guests from the Canadian Mental Health Association, Edmonton region, who are here to promote mental health awareness week and this year's theme: invest in yourself. For 55 years the Canadian Mental Health Association has been supporting the resilience and recovery of people experiencing mental illness. The CMHA is engaged with the community in education, advocacy, housing, community rehab, and supporting recovery for people

living with mental illness. I would like to invite my colleagues in the Assembly to join me at the sunny side up breakfast at CMHA offices tomorrow at 7:30 a.m.

I would now ask that my guests rise as I call their names and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly: Brenda Wentzell, board member and chair of the social action committee; Dick Southworth, board member and chair of the fund development committee; Ione Challborn, executive director; and staff members Natasha Nicholson and Connie Benjamin. Also accompanying them are nine individuals involved in various CMHA programs. I would ask that the Assembly now join me in providing them with the traditional warm welcome.

Members' Statements

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

Pochaiv Maple Leaf Safe House

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As an Albertan of Ukrainian descent and as chair of the Advisory Council on Alberta-Ukraine Relations I would like to speak briefly about the Pochaiv maple leaf safe house project, or World for Children, an organization that is very near and dear to my heart. The Pochaiv project has been operating in the village of Malechkovitchi, Ukraine, since February 2000. This project was created to address the issue of human trafficking and, more specifically, the growing trafficking of women in both Ukraine and in Alberta.

The Pochaiv safe house project is comprised of volunteers throughout Alberta who are dedicated to improving the lives of women affected by human trafficking. A safe house has been created where teens will be protected from human trafficking and sex slavery. A school is to be created nearby so that these teens can receive the education that they so dearly deserve. Other local service agencies like Youth Emergency Shelter and Crossroads Outreach also help to provide a brief transition for trafficked children, teens, and women from eastern Europe. The government of Alberta has given financial support to this project through the Wild Rose Foundation, but private donations from both Albertans and Canadians remain the largest source of funding for these activities.

The hon. Minister of Aboriginal Relations and I have personally visited the Pochaiv project in Ukraine. When I returned to Canada, I helped to raise \$5,000 to help an orphanage buy a washer and dryer and, along with some of my former students from H.E. Bourgoin school in Bonnyville, have also sponsored a child in need.

I will be tabling two documents from this organization later this afternoon to help raise awareness about trafficking of women both in Ukraine and in Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

1:40 Lethbridge High Level Bridge Centennial

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and speak to this House about a subject near and dear to everyone in my hometown of Lethbridge. This year marks the 100th anniversary of the Lethbridge viaduct, better known as the High Level Bridge. Over the past century the bridge has become synonymous with Lethbridge and is the city's most remarkable landmark. The bridge is the longest and highest bridge of its kind in the world and was a true marvel of engineering when it was built at the turn of the century.

Mr. Speaker, the official centennial celebrations for the High Level Bridge began months ago, and they are definitely picking up steam as we head into spring. Member groups of the Allied Arts Council in Lethbridge have planned several commemorating events for the spring and summer to help local residents get in the spirit.

The Lethbridge Symphony Orchestra, for example, will finish up a series of concerts called Building Bridges. Another musical celebration, featuring the University of Lethbridge Global Drums and the Irish Dance Academy, will be hosted on May 9. In recognition of the bridge's significant contribution to the south, the Galt Museum will open an exhibit May 9 dedicated to the history of the bridge and the economic benefits. Later this summer the Allied Arts Council will host a number of exhibitions in honour of the bridge, including a temporary display in the river valley and a one-day festival is planned for September. The city of Lethbridge has even commissioned a piece of public art to be displayed north of the Galt Museum.

Mr. Speaker, the goal of these centennial events is to reflect the crucial role that the High Level Bridge has played and continues to play in defining Lethbridge's unique character.

As a special note, the grandfather of the Member for Livingstone-Macleod, Mr. Gus Malchow, was a riveter during the construction of this bridge.

I'd like to take the opportunity to invite all my colleagues and their constituents to come to Lethbridge this spring and summer and take in some of the celebrations to mark this milestone in the city's history.

I would also like to ask that my fellow members join me in congratulating the Allied Arts Council, CP Rail, and the great citizens of Lethbridge for their hard work in making the bridge's centennial year a memorable one. As my friend Suzanne Lint says: when you see the bridge, you know you're home.

Thank you.

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

Bitumen Upgrading

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Liberal caucus strongly believes that as much bitumen as possible should be upgraded right here in Alberta. Upgrading bitumen here ensures that we ship a more valuable product. It provides many profitable spinoff industries. It creates long-term, well-paid, full-time employment for thousands of Albertans. We cannot have our province become a strip mine for raw bitumen export.

We are impatient to see government action on this issue. Such action might involve bitumen royalties in kind used to boost the local upgrading market. It might involve other measures, too, if necessary. We're impatient because we're concerned by the increasing rate of bitumen exports to the United States. Pipeline companies are getting long-term contracts. New upgrading facilities are being built in Texas, Illinois, and Oklahoma. We here in Alberta are getting left behind.

What we need to do is clearly assess what proportion of bitumen can be upgraded here in Alberta. We need to look at the labour resources and limits, the environmental resources and limits, and the infrastructure resources and limits. When we know what we can upgrade here, we can get on with it. If there's too much production for Alberta's capacity, which at the top end of predictions would probably be the case, we would look first to our neighbours in Canada to pick up the surplus, thus building a broader coalition of national support for our oil sands industry.

We can do this. We can make it work. It will take determination and vision. But if we do it, we can look forward to an upgrading

industry in Alberta that drives this province and this country to a prosperous future.

Thank you.

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

Smart Technologies Corporation

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to speak about an event last Friday attended by the hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology and the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow. Smart Technologies Corporation officially opened their new headquarters and research centre in Calgary. The building is a model of environmental initiatives and energy conservation. It produces 50 per cent less greenhouse gas emissions relative to a typical office building and has numerous leading environmental aspects. At over 211,000 square feet the building cost over \$60 million to construct and is expected to become one of only nine office buildings in Canada to meet the leadership in energy and environmental design, or LEED, gold certification.

Mr. Speaker, the company is best known for the Smart interactive whiteboard, which it brought to market in 1991. From humble beginnings to the world's leading provider of interactive whiteboards and other technology products Smart is a great example of Alberta's ingenuity, innovation, and business development.

The company employs 750 people in Calgary and over 1,300 world-wide. It is the largest technology company in the province and a model for many others. Despite the current global economic climate Smart continues to hire to meet the needs of an expanding world-wide customer base and expects to add over a hundred full-time employees to its Calgary operations this year. In its fiscal year ended March 31, 2009, Smart grew revenue by approximately 35 per cent, and for the 2010 fiscal year the company expects to grow at or above the same rate.

I would like to recognize the leadership and the staff of Smart Technologies for their caring approach to the environment and their creation of an internationally significant technology business.

Thank you.

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

Food Allergy Awareness Week

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Food allergy week is being held May 10 to 16 across Canada and in Alberta. During this time the Food Allergy & Anaphylaxis Network is stepping up its efforts to educate Canadians and Albertans about allergens and how to reduce behaviour that puts a person at risk of a reaction. An allergic reaction occurs when the immune system responds to a substance like food, dust, moulds, or pollens that the body mistakenly identifies as harmful. Symptoms can vary from mild symptoms of an itchy rash to shortness of breath, wheezing, and swelling of the throat to severe symptoms, which are devastating, and severe anaphylactic reactions, which can and have resulted in death.

Mr. Speaker, the foods that account for the majority of food allergic reactions include various dairy, seafood, soy, wheat, and nut products. Other common causes of allergies include antibiotics, especially penicillin, and bee stings. It is estimated that approximately 6 per cent of young children and 3 to 4 per cent of adult Canadians suffer from food allergies. I'd like to remind Albertans to be careful when preparing food for any group event, and I strongly encourage my colleagues and everyone in this House to take action and prevent reactions throughout the coming year. Albertans need to know what they're eating, so please pay attention to food labels.

Treatment for allergies is simple. Number one, don't expose yourself to potential allergens that you know you're allergic to. Secondly, seek treatment for allergic reactions. That usually involves antihistamines. Lastly, if Albertans have had anaphylactic or severe reactions, they should have injectable adrenalin with them at all times.

I'd also like to take this opportunity to recognize the Food Allergy & Anaphylaxis Network for its dedication to saving and improving the lives of Canadians through their awareness and education programs.

Thank you.

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

Julie Mulligan

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to deliver one of the most significant member's statements I am sure I will ever make, and that is to say: welcome home, Julie Mulligan. I am sure that most Albertans joined with the community of Drayton Valley and Julie's husband and children and shared in their anxiety and fears for the nearly two weeks she was held by her kidnappers in Nigeria. The community of Drayton Valley, as its motto states, pulled together for Julie's husband, John, and their family but also came together to pray for her safety and to guide her return. Prayers and letters of support were received from around the world, and indeed prayers were offered at the recent Premier's prayer breakfast.

Julie is a personal friend of mine, and those two weeks were a tough time for all of us who knew her. Our prayers were answered with Julie's release on April 29. Amazingly, she was not physically hurt. I am so proud of my community, my province, and my country as all played a role in her safe return. I want to thank the local RCMP and the Solicitor General's office and all those involved in negotiating Julie's safe return.

Mr. Speaker, sometimes you get a second chance in life. In Drayton Valley we are very blessed to have Julie back home safe. To Julie, John, and family, you are an example of how quickly life can change and how fortunate you are and we all are to have a second chance to have Julie back in our lives and our community.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

H1N1 Influenza Virus

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The first severe Canadian case of H1N1 flu lies in an Edmonton hospital today. My information is that this is an elementary student, and this raises questions about what is being done, what is being communicated, and why parents, teachers, and the public are being kept in the dark about this. Minimizing panic is important at a time like this. Hiding information, as some administrations have found around the world, increases people's anxiety unnecessarily. To the minister: can the minister tell us why parents at the school and the public are being kept in the dark about this case?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think I've said on several occasions in this House that it is important that we all show leadership and don't make comments that could be seen as an overreaction. We have an outstanding chief medical officer of health, who is working with the federal Public Health Agency and other

provincial governments. There is a strategy in place across Canada. The advice of the chief medical officer of health is that the information that has been made public is appropriate, and as I am sure the Leader of the Opposition would appreciate, in a situation like this we should be taking the best possible professional advice that we can get.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, several schools in B.C. and the United States have closed in the last week around cases of H1N1. Can the minister explain the guidelines for school closure in Alberta?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I won't say any more from a health standpoint. That was not the advice we were given by the chief medical officer of health. But I would ask the Minister of Education if he would choose to supplement.

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, we've been in contact with the school board involved and also, of course, taking advice from the chief medical officer of health. Following that advice appropriately, the information that we were given is that this is not a circumstance where it is necessary to inform others in the school. At this point there is not an indication of risk.

Dr. Swann: Well, recently senior public health officers resigned from this government in protest of government policy that does not support their work in this province. Does the minister now see the downside of a weakened public health system?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I've said on several occasions that you can spend all your life looking in a rear-view mirror, or you can look out the windshield. We prefer to look ahead. We have made an outstanding choice in our new chief medical officer of health. He has shown through this particular set of circumstances very strong leadership. We have brought through in this particular session some significant amendments to the Public Health Act which strengthen that act, and I think we have an outstanding public health system moving forward.

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

Temporary Medical Tent

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Sick children being treated in a tent is something you'd expect in an impoverished country, but it's become the new normal at Edmonton's flagship University hospital, where in the last year over 2,500 sick and injured children have been treated in a tent because facilities are so crowded. The hurt yurt, as the staff have dubbed it, was to be replaced with a permanent structure starting this month. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: why was the construction project to replace this tent with a real building cancelled?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, as the member is well aware, we have some significant financial challenges facing the government. We have made some decisions around capital. That being said, as we move forward in this particular budget year, we want to ensure that we are getting full value for the capital that we have allocated. I am confident and optimistic that we are going to have the opportunity to see some projects proceed that may be proceeding at a rate

that is less than what we had originally estimated, and at that time, if that does occur, we will review all of our capital initiatives that for financial reasons weren't able to go ahead in this particular year.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Well, Mr. Minister, sick children and their parents and families and an outraged staff are tired of the broken promises. How can this minister justify putting sick children in a tent while this government spends lavishly on expensive trips to Europe and drops millions on dinner parties and horse racing? Where are your priorities?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I think we need to be sure that appropriate information is communicated because there is so much incorrect information in the lead-up to that question. In this particular year this government is committing some 7 billion dollars to capital projects across this province. I think that on a per capita basis that is higher than anywhere else in Canada. Included in that is about a billion and a half for health facilities. In the last three to four years capital construction in health care has exceeded some 5 billion to 6 billion dollars, and I think that's a record this government is very proud of.

Dr. Taft: Well, the tent where sick and injured children have been treated now for over a year sits in the shadow of the Mazankowski Heart Institute. The Mazankowski, which is a year late in opening, got \$36 million at the end of last year to finish office spaces while children will be shunted to a tent for years to come. To the same minister: since when did it become acceptable in Alberta to treat sick and injured children in a tent? How did we get to this?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, we have outstanding facilities in this province – I can name them all, but I think the member is well aware – several of them in his own constituency, too, and some of the leading-edge pediatric services in the world in this province. To suggest somehow that our children, our future, are not receiving the kind of health care that they need and desire is absolutely incorrect.

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

Provincial Electoral Divisions

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, Alberta needs four more MLAs about as much as a dog needs fleas. I already hear rumblings from the other side about how many seats will be added to this Legislature and their distribution. Can the Justice minister tell me why we're wasting taxpayers' dollars by adding four more seats?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe that the hon. member is referring to legislation that was tabled yesterday. There will be discussion in this House on that. What I would say is that what this government cares about for this province is effective representation across this province, and that's why we made the decision that we did.

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, this government goes to great lengths to stress their frugal, small-government approach. It's a front. To the Minister of Justice: why is it that Ontario and Quebec members of provincial Legislatures can handle more constituents per capita than Alberta MLAs?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I think it's important to explain to the member that we all have different jobs in this world. There will be a commission that will be established. That commission will determine how best to make sure that Albertans are effectively represented. I think that if we look across this country, one of the things that we will find is that there are very different distributions of people in different parts of this country. We believe that for the people of Alberta this decision is the right decision.

Mr. Hehr: Well, Mr. Speaker, to the Justice minister again: as any increase to the Alberta population has happened in urban centres, why is it that this government will not just redraw the electoral map to reflect this change instead of adding four more seats primarily to rural ridings?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This again gives me the opportunity to have a little discussion about what everyone's job is. It is not the job of this government to redraw the boundaries; it is the job of the commission. The commission will decide how Albertans should be best and most effectively represented, and we will wait to hear their recommendations.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

Parental Choice in Education

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. The government proposes adding new human rights for Alberta children, including the right to not learn about sexuality, sexual orientation, or religion, which according to the Premier includes evolution. It's an interesting list, considering that it could have included the creation of rights for disabled students or protection against bullying. Obviously, someone has been urging this government to create this specific list of rights. Can the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit tell the House what groups have been urging the government to protect so-called parental rights?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, it'd be my pleasure. One such group was a group of Alberta faith leaders that I met with a little over a year ago. They include Bishop Fred Henry; Reverend Tim Seim, the president of the Alberta Church Executive Fellowship; Syed Soharwardy, the president of the Islamic Supreme Council of Canada; Reverend Glen Johnson, chair of Synod Council, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada; Kulwant Dhillon, adviser to president, Dashmesh Culture Centre, the Sikh temple; Majeed Ahmad, national vice-president, Ahmadiyya Muslim Community; Reverend Jonathan Gibson, chairman, Calgary and southern Alberta chapter, Anglican Essentials Canada . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Will the minister confirm that each one of those individuals and groups that he has named urged the government to create these categories of rights in the human rights act?

2:00

Mr. Blackett: Actually, Mr. Speaker, if you look at the *Calgary Herald* today, Bishop Fred Henry, the spokesman for the group, has

said that they had met with us and that they were disappointed that we didn't go with further recommendations, not only parental rights, not as far as they wanted to go. They wanted us to amend many other such things, and our caucus, when we looked at it, decided that in the best interests of Albertans we would go forward with the parental rights portion of the human rights bill because we believe in parental rights, we believe in family values, and we believe in the best interests of Albertans.

Mr. Mason: That remains to be seen. However, the minister did not answer the question. He quoted from a newspaper article quoting one person, being Bishop Henry. The question I asked and that I would like an answer for is whether or not the minister is claiming that every one of those groups and individuals he named supports the changes that he is proposing.

Mr. Blackett: Mr. Speaker, I said that they don't support that because they believe that we didn't go far enough. Now, Bishop Henry has been on the record. I'd be glad to give those names. The hon. member can contact them and ask them himself if they believe in that or not.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

U.S. Tax Credit for Pulp Producers

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituency is home to the Alberta-Pacific pulp mill, and my constituents and other Albertans are concerned about the impact of an unfair tax credit for U.S. pulp producers to burn black liquor in their recovery boilers. One industry analyst indicated the potential tax credit for just one mill at one company could reach \$240 million just this year alone. My questions are for the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Can he tell us why this U.S. tax policy is a threat to Alberta pulp mills?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, it's a very serious threat to Alberta and British Columbia pulp mills and the communities they support, and we're doing all we can to bring it to an end as soon as possible. Black liquor is a byproduct of making pulp, and in both Canada and the United States it's burned as an alternative and renewable fuel to generate power in these pulp mills. So far so good. But starting last fall U.S. tax policies began to provide subsidies to American producers if they put diesel fuel in with the black liquor. As the hon. member pointed out, these subsidies run \$200 million to \$300 million per mill up to \$3 billion to \$6 billion for the American industry over the next year. This incentive is encouraging U.S. companies to overproduce pulp, drive down prices, and Canadian mills and European mills can't compete against this type of unfair and perverse subsidy.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This certainly is a serious issue for Alberta pulp mills. I'd ask the minister: is this biofuel tax subsidy actually incenting a reduction in the use of fossil fuels?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. No, that's the absurdity of the whole policy. It's a policy fiasco. It's actually going into the

U.S. mills who are already burning a renewable fuel, the black liquor, and paying them to add kerosene or diesel to it to qualify for this subsidy. It's an incredible waste of scarce environmental dollars. It's bad for the environment. It's bad for pulp markets. We're doing all we can to call public attention to this policy fiasco.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the minister tell us what he's doing to restore a level playing field for our Alberta pulp industry?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is working with British Columbia to communicate the complete unacceptability of this subsidy. We're going through both official and unofficial channels. Officially the Alberta and British Columbia governments have communicated our concern to the Canadian government and through Ottawa to the U.S. government. We are also using Alberta's official representative in Washington, our former colleague Mr. Gary Mar. He's doing a very good job on this file. Informally we're working with organizations and industries in Canada, in the United States, and in Europe who are all opposed to this, and we're making progress. Senator John Kerry, usually not my favourite U.S. Senator, denounced this policy. He called it a licence to cheat, and many Senators are bringing motions to terminate this as soon as possible.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Alberta Health Services

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The CEO of Alberta Health Services wrote last week that there isn't enough money to balance the books this year, so more belt-tightening is needed, and the brakes have been put on staff recruitment. To the minister: is the Minister of Health and Wellness aware that the chief of Alberta Health Services is speaking of belt-tightening and putting the brakes on staff recruitment?

Mr. Liepert: I'm not aware of the particular document that the member refers to, but it would seem to me that if this particular CEO did what I believe he needs to do – that is, ensure that in our health care system we are spending our money wisely, as the Leader of the Opposition has referred to so many times – it would not surprise me that he would be seeking some efficiencies in the system, Mr. Speaker.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, this government has mismanaged our health care system so badly for so long that we now have children being treated in tents, we have a wait-list registry out of date for seven months, and it's now standard practice to wedge patients into a two-bed room with three beds. This is not a crisis; this is the new normal in Alberta's urban hospitals. Will the Minister of Health and Wellness tell us what further belt-tightening the CEO has in mind for Health Services?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I guess you could use the term "belt-tightening," or you could use the term "creating efficiencies within the system." Clearly, we have a situation where we had 12 different entities that have been merged into one. There's obviously

going to be duplication of services. I'm sure that if the Leader of the Opposition is responsible, he would not expect that we would continue to duplicate services, and those are the kinds of reviews and decisions that will be forthcoming over the course of the next year.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, last week the minister said in this Assembly that there never was a hiring freeze at Alberta Health Services, but the memo, dated April 22, written by the vice-president of medical affairs said, and I quote: all recruitment efforts must cease until further notice. End quote. To the minister: since the minister had no idea that something as important as a written policy to freeze hiring had been issued, will the minister admit he has no understanding of what's going on in his department?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I think that if there's a lack of understanding, it's by the Leader of the Opposition. Frankly, I would have expected more from someone who has a background in the medical community. Let's be clear. The memo, which I haven't seen but that he continues to refer to, I believe was about a specific hiring around academic staff. First of all, I challenged the hon. leader last night in estimates. He alleged that we have recruited doctors, signed contracts with them, and then, if my memory serves me correctly, sent them home. I've challenged him to prove to me that that has happened. If he can't prove it to me, then I'm going to ask him to stand up in this House and apologize to Alberta Health Services for making a wide-ranging accusation that he cannot substantiate.

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

Wildfire Assistance

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. There were wildfires burning on the weekend in my constituency in Ma-Me-O Beach, Ermineskin and Louis Bull First Nations as well as currently in Strathcona county, Lamont county, and Bruderheim. Can the minister tell us how he is supporting and how his department is supporting these firefighting efforts and municipalities?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, the safety of the public is our priority and focus. Also, the Premier passes on his praise and gratitude to all of the voluntary firefighters doing such an excellent job in fighting these fires. The government of Alberta has activated its emergency operations centre. We are on-site and in direct contact with local officials that are affected, municipalities or First Nations. Alberta emergency management staff is helping co-ordinate resources to fight fires, and we will continue to provide resources and expertise to these communities.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Minister.

My next question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. What is the department's role in fighting wildfires in the province, and what is the department doing to assist communities in that role?

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The mandate of Sustainable Resource Development is to fight wildfires in the province's forest

protection zone, the green zone which covers two-thirds of the province. So far already this season we have fought 216 fires covering 900 hectares in the green zone.

When capacity allows, when we have the equipment and fire-fighters available, we do help MDs and Indian reserves and Métis settlements to fight fires on their territories. In the case of the Lamont and Strathcona fires, SRD is providing support-team firefighters and bulldozers. They help us also put out fires on unoccupied Crown land, so it's a partnership that works well.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Wildfires don't respect municipal boundaries, and we've seen fires rage across rural municipalities onto First Nation reserves and vice versa. My question is for the Minister of Aboriginal Relations. Can he tell us what measures are in place to ensure that aboriginal communities are protected from the devastating effects of these fires?

Mr. Zwodzesky: Mr. Speaker, one of the most important measures in place today is the so-called mutual assistance agreement. Many First Nations, in fact most, do have a partnering agreement with their neighbouring municipalities and/or also in some cases with local industry to respond immediately to the kind of potential tragedies that the member has alluded to. In fact, that's exactly what happened this last weekend. The four bands at Hobbema collaborated with local fire departments, and they stopped the potential spread of a very tragic fire there.

Otherwise, educational safety about fires is also very prevalent right now.

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

Parental Choice in Education

(continued)

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The human rights act amendments are causing more problems than they're fixing. If parents have a concern now, it is dealt with by the school or the school board. If parents have a concern in the future, it will likely become an issue for the Human Rights Commission, with all the costs attendant on that since both the plaintiff and the defendant have to pay their own fees and hire lawyers, et cetera. My questions are to the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit. The minister avoided a direct answer yesterday, so I would try again for an answer today. Can section 11.1 of the proposed legislation be used to launch a human rights complaint against a teacher, a school, or a school board?

The Speaker: All hon. members should know that the question period is not the time for legal interpretation. Proceed.

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd say that if there is a part in the human rights act that pertains to an area that's covered under that legislation, then they would have an opportunity to present a case before them. Also, understand that the school board and the school system have provisions to deal with a lot of those issues. Just because a parent has a grievance with a school board does not mean that they have grounds for a case to the Human Rights Commission.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Back to the same minister. If a parent believes that there's been subject matter that deals explicitly with religion, sexuality, or sexual orientation, does section 11.1 empower that parent or guardian to bring a complaint before the Human Rights Commission?

Mr. Blackett: Well, it's a legal issue. It's cause for speculation. There is provision right now to have that remedied. The school board's responsibility will be to notify that parent, and the parent has that right to opt out. If there is a situation – and I fail to see where one would arise – they would not do that in a course because very few instances have ever happened with respect to that nature.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Back to the same minister. If the minister is so sure about the lack of problems, will the minister commit to covering all of the legal fees that will be incurred by teachers, school boards, and schools that emerge as a result of section 11.1?

Mr. Blackett: Mr. Speaker, reasonable people ask reasonable questions. The opposition member opposite obviously isn't one of those.

Ms Blakeman: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Blackett: Of course I would not subject my government to any such expense.

The Speaker: Okay. We have a point of order here as well.

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

Safe Communities Innovation Fund

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Crime and personal safety continue to be major concerns in Edmonton. Last month *Maclean's* magazine ranked our city as one of the most dangerous cities to live in in Canada. To the Minister of Justice and Attorney General: what are you doing to reduce crime in the capital city?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think Edmonton is a great city for me to be able to spend time in, and I know that people that live here are very proud of it. Edmonton has a wonderful mayor and a wonderful chief of police, who are partners with us in our safe communities initiative. Our initiative has been able to respond to a number of the concerns that people in the community have had. We've been able to put more Crown prosecutors and more police on the streets. We have more support staff and more probation officers in place. We're now funding particular community initiatives. We believe that the community and the leaders in local communities want to and need to be part of our partnership, and we're happy to support them.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the same minister. With the announcement of the safe communities innovation fund Albertans can look forward to some grassroots approaches to crime prevention developed by individual communities. Can Edmonton expect to see any of these projects?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The safe communities innovation fund will fund 30 projects across the province in the next year that will each be three years in duration. We were very fortunate, the Solicitor General and I, on March 19 to be able to announce the first of those projects, which is two new crime councils that are being set up in Edmonton to address issues from graffiti to gang violence. The councils empower neighbourhoods that have been identified as having chronic crime issues to take back their community. Crime councils allow them to take an active role, to participate, to have discussion, and to do positive activities such as street fairs, which have been a great success. This joint project between the city of Edmonton and the Edmonton Police Service will be expanded into Castle Downs, Mill Woods, Clareview, and Avenue of Nations.

Mr. Elniski: My final supplemental is to the same minister. Can the minister explain how these projects funded by the safe communities initiative will remain sustainable? Short-term project funding is often the kiss of death for meaningful improvement.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That was a very important piece of the conversations that we had with community groups as they put forward proposals for this project. As I said, these are three-year initiatives. We have a commitment as a government to ensuring that what we do with our safe communities piece is not only short-term pieces that might address immediate challenges but also talk about how we change the way government and partnerships work together to deal with safe communities. So as we were funding and deciding what to fund, one of the things that we asked communities was: how do you expect to be able to make this project sustainable? We know that there are commitments from municipalities with respect to this. It's an ongoing commitment for our government as well.

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

Alberta Health Services (continued)

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Dr. Stephen Duckett, the CEO of Alberta Health Services, has posted on his blog a new document entitled Alberta Health Services: Strategic Direction 2009-2012. There's a quote here for the benefit of the health minister. "These priorities address goals established by the Government of Alberta and are aligned with Vision 2020." My first question is to the minister of health. Given that eliminating waste, duplication, and inappropriate care is one of the means of the strategic plan, can the minister please provide examples of waste, duplication, and inappropriate care currently within Alberta Health Services?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to get specific, but I'll repeat what I said earlier. When you merge and amalgamate some 12 entities, you tend to have a number of people who have done the same job in each one of those entities. We want to ensure that our management and administration is streamlined and that the dollars that Alberta Health Services has to work with are almost exclusively directed to the front-line delivery.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the minister of health: given that on that blog Dr. Stephen Duckett has indicated there will be this week up to 100 managers from across the province laid off in the health care system, which managers has the minister of health instructed Dr. Duckett to lay off?

Mr. Liepert: None, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. That certainly is interesting. That's not what I heard.

Mr. Liepert: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. MacDonald: Now, to the same minister: given that the strategic plan also indicates that there's going to be an increase in the ratio of licensed practical nurses to registered nurses, can the minister please tell us what the new ratio of licensed practical nurses to RNs will be after his plan is implemented by Dr. Stephen Duckett?

2:20

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, clearly that's a decision of the management of Alberta Health Services. They have a job to do, and they will do it. I don't give them any direction on what staff ratios should be, and the member knows that. He's having trouble finding things to criticize in Alberta Health and Wellness these days, and he's not doing a very good job at what he's found.

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

Child and Youth Advocate

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For years the NDP has been calling on this government to make the Child and Youth Advocate an independent officer of the Legislature. Alberta, as I've mentioned, is the only jurisdiction refusing to do this. This government's refusal to give the advocate position its own voice shows they are more concerned with censoring information than doing what's best for our children. To the minister of children and families: why won't you stop delaying and just make the advocate an independent officer of the Legislature?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As this member knows, we have over the last couple of months undertaken a review of the advocacy for children in the province and, in particular, how the advocate reports to Albertans and what other provinces are doing across the country. That work has been completed. I do have a copy, and we're just working on a government response to it. I hope to be releasing that information fairly soon.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, by January this government was reviewing the Child and Youth Advocate report to government. By March 15 the minister had that review, and she promised to make it available "in the next several weeks." Well, it's closing in on two months now, and we've heard nothing. When will the minister stop delaying, make this report public, and tell Albertans if she plans to let the Child and Youth Advocate off her leash?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I would just reiterate that I'm not delaying the report. We are working on a government response, and I do hope to share that information soon. What I can assure both this member and Albertans is that we will make sure at the end of the day that we have a strong voice for children, that we have a very accountable advocacy system, and as well that we'll have reporting to Albertans that will be timely and make a lot of sense.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, the minister had the report in early March, and she said that she'd act on the report "quite quickly," and she said that she'd make it public. Well, we're still waiting, and if this is her version of quite quickly, I worry about those children who need her to act quite quickly when their safety is at stake. To the same minister: why have you failed to make this report public if not because you're reluctant to give up control of the advocate position and risk exposing further failures in your ministry?

Ms Tarchuk: Mr. Speaker, I would say the same thing and, as well, that the children are still being taken care of. Once again, the review was just called at the end of November. You're right: it has been in my hands for the last couple of weeks. I can tell you that it's very good information that they have come forward with, and we will have a government response shortly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Environmental Assessment Database

Mr. Vandermeer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a former home builder I know how important it is to understand the history of the land you are building on. The last thing my constituents and Albertans across the province want to find out is that the land they have just purchased has previously been contaminated. Many people don't know how to find this type of information, and for those that do, it is tedious, time-consuming work. My question is to the Minister of Environment. I understand your department launched an online database last week. Will this help my constituents and Albertans like them find out the environmental history of this piece of land?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a matter of fact, the member is absolutely correct. When I became Environment minister, I was quite frankly surprised to learn that Environment leads all departments in FOIP requests. The reason is that the vast majority of those FOIP requests are asking for information regarding environmental assessments on various pieces of land. It really is quite exciting that what previously has required as much as five weeks or more will now take five minutes to access online. It's a huge improvement.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Vandermeer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the same minister. My understanding is that the database houses documents relating to thousands of sites. Does this mean that all of these sites are contaminated?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, absolutely not. We have to emphasize that. What this database contains is all of the environmental assessments. Oftentimes environmental assessments are done that indicate that there is no contamination. Just because there is an environmental assessment on a particular piece of property should not be taken to mean that there was contamination. What it does mean is that the individual who is purchasing that property or interested in going onto the website can find out what the contents of that environmental assessment are.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Vandermeer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: in these tough economic times can you justify the cost of this new system to the taxpayers? How much are my constituents going to have to pay for the use of this system?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, there's no charge to access the system. It's done through the Internet. There were, obviously, some costs that were borne by my department in developing the system, but even there we used existing software that was already used in Service Alberta. So I think that this is truly an excellent opportunity to demonstrate how you can apply technology from affiliated fields, different fields, and actually work to the benefit of both government and the consumer.

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

Funding for Contingencies

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government is about to pass a \$37 billion budget with no plan for savings to speak of and a budget which has eliminated the required contingency for public emergencies. Crossing your fingers and hoping there aren't any natural disasters is no way to run a province. But since this government still can't wrap its head around the need to save in the heritage fund, I guess asking them to save for natural disasters might be too much to hope for. To the minister of finance: how will the government pay for the forest fires that are forcing people from their homes just east of Edmonton?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance and Enterprise.

Ms Evans: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member is right. We removed the contingency amount from within the budget, and we will use the sustainability fund. There is \$17 billion in the sustainability fund this year. We plan to use \$4.7 billion to achieve our operational targets. If we need more and it's not available within the operating budgets, it certainly is within the purview of the minister to bring those forward with recommendations to Treasury Board, where we can examine them. Natural disasters, emergencies, pine beetles: all of these kinds of things will qualify for disaster funding, so we haven't reduced the opportunity. We've reduced the place where we allocate the funds to deliver that.

Mr. Taylor: Well, Mr. Speaker, what money specifically has been set aside to pay for unforeseen circumstances such as fires and floods and pine beetles and flu pandemics and whatever else could happen during the summer? What specific money is set aside, or is the money in the sustainability fund that would pay for those sorts of things just kind of in a big competition with everything else?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, that sustainability fund is still available. As I indicated, we certainly don't intend to spend all of it, all \$17 billion, but \$4.7 billion this year. If we have to, we will spend \$100 million, \$200 million, or whatever it takes to achieve the results of reducing the impact of emergencies for Albertans. There isn't a cap on that amount. Hopefully, we'll have to spend none of it. Hopefully, the dollars that are within existing operating budgets will cover it, but we are prepared for disasters. The theory behind the sustainability fund hasn't evaporated with this new Fiscal Responsibility Act.

Mr. Taylor: Hopefully, the sustainability fund won't evaporate over the next three or four years of deficit operating as well.

Will this government commit to a detailed savings plan, including a contingency for public emergencies, before it passes this budget?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, we will not commit to a detailed plan. We have outlined in broad terms the plan to save, first of all, to rebuild the sustainability fund. On this we are following the theory and the practical advice from several economists, who indicate that while you are spending your emergency savings is not the time to try to rebuild the savings account. We will leave the heritage fund intact. We will endeavour to hold the line on ministers' expenses within 1 per cent of their operating budgets.

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

2:30 Temporary Foreign Workers

Mr. Benito: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I hear from permanent and temporary constituents who are concerned about layoffs. In particular, there is confusion over the rules for employers when temporary foreign workers and Albertans are employed. People have heard that there are rules about who can be laid off and who can't. My first question is to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. Can you explain what the rules are for employers who have to lay off workers?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The temporary foreign worker program is a federal program. It is employer driven, and the employer must show that no Albertans or Canadians are willing or are available to take on the jobs. The federal government does not have specific rules for who should be laid off. All workers in Canada have the same rights, and to lay off a worker based on national origin could be discriminating. If a business is struggling and layoffs are required, the decision as to who is laid off is up to the employer. It's strictly a business decision.

Mr. Benito: My second and final question is also to the same minister. In the case of layoffs what are the employers' obligations to the workers?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Employers have obligations to all workers under the employment standards, workplace health and safety, and workers' compensation legislation. Layoffs are usually very, very difficult. We do have resources available to Albertans, including temporary foreign workers that are affected by job losses. Our first priority is the needs of Albertans, and we

provide employment connections, information, training, and financial assistance. Temporary foreign workers can contact our advisory office through the helpline or in person in both Edmonton and Calgary.

The Speaker: The hon. member?

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay.

Protection of Children in Care

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Proposed changes to service delivery for child and family services in Edmonton will fund service providers to reach an outcome within a benchmark time frame, providing no extra funding if a case takes longer than the prescribed time to complete. Additional funding will only be provided if the case has been closed for six months and then reopened or if a new issue emerges. To the Minister of Children and Youth Services: what happens when the funding stops and a child is still in need of care?

Ms Tarchuk: Mr. Speaker, we would always provide services to a child in care or a family at risk. I'm not quite sure what the member is talking about, but I would suggest that he forward that information to me.

Mr. Chase: Internal documents from your ministry have raised this concern.

Does this change not risk acting as a disincentive with the potential result of a lesser quality for those cases which will take longer than the specified timeline?

Ms Tarchuk: Again, Mr. Speaker, we would never walk away from quality, so I would suggest that the member share with me whatever it is that he is talking about.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Why is funding not being provided to regions to adequately fund the successful completion of cases they have as opposed to being provided based on rigid timelines? What comes first, the dollar or the child?

Ms Tarchuk: Mr. Speaker, the child will always come first. We will always do what's in the best interest of the child. Once again I would just suggest that the member share that information with me.

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

First Nations Development Fund

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First Nations in Alberta have experienced a tremendous windfall as a result of funds generated by on-reserve casinos. These funds have become a very important facilitator for numerous infrastructure, cultural, and community development projects on reserve. However, some First Nations in and around Calgary have expressed concerns which I would like to express to the Minister of Aboriginal Relations. Why was this fund moved to the Ministry of Aboriginal Relations from the AGLC ministry?

Mr. Zwodzesky: Mr. Speaker, the First Nations development fund does a tremendous amount of good work through the dollars we

provide, about \$100 million annually to the 47 First Nations in the province. The short answer to the question is that the aims and objectives of the First Nations development fund are very closely aligned with the aims and objectives of the newly created, stand-alone Ministry of Aboriginal Relations. For that reason it was felt better to administer it through this particular ministry, and so far it's working very well.

Ms Woo-Paw: FNDF is a flow-through program from First Nations casinos to First Nations projects. Why is your ministry asking for detailed information on FNDF applications?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, as with all programs administered by the government of Alberta, there's a need for a good balance between program effectiveness and program accountability and meeting and matching the needs of local community development projects or local economic development projects such as this particular fund is set up to administer. In short, we ask for a project description, we ask for a budget to see how it'll be accomplished, we require a band council resolution and the signing of an FNDF agreement. All of this was determined in consultation with the 47 First Nations, and we're adhering to what was determined years ago.

Ms Woo-Paw: How many times can one First Nation access the FNDF in any one year?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, access to the fund is actually governed in accordance with a fairly sophisticated formula which the government of Alberta negotiated with the First Nations host casinos and other First Nations in the province. That particular formula is available publicly. We have approximately 40 per cent of 70 per cent of the total revenues from government slots to distribute. We don't make it complicated at all. In fact, we've never refused an application. We have held up a few or requested that they be delayed to get more information in. But that's how the fund is administered.

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

Direct Energy Retail Marketing

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans need a government of action, not a government of monitoring. We are getting gouged on utility bills, but the Minister of Service Alberta and the Utilities Consumer Advocate do nothing to help us. My questions are to the Minister of Service Alberta. Why isn't the minister and the UCA taking real action to fix these problems?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to the Direct Energy issue, as indicated before, we have sent a number of warning letters in the past year, and the company has been very cooperative. However, the consumer has spoken. The consumer has indicated that we need to do more, and that's, indeed, what we're doing. That's what this undertaking is about, to make sure that we find out what's happening and that consumers are protected.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A hotline to the Utilities Consumer Advocate is not fixing the problem of a system that lets

Albertans get charged too much. Why won't the minister simply change the contracting system to let Albertans get out of these unfair contracts?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to indicate that the Utilities Consumer Advocate, the team that works out of that office, do excellent work, and they certainly take calls to the call centre every day. Certainly, they should be commended for their work and the good work they are doing for Albertans.

With respect to the issue with Direct Energy, as we move forward to September 30, when we get to that point, if we're not happy with what has gone on, there are issues like director's orders, and there are a number of other initiatives we can take to solve these problems if we can't collaborate and fix it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think September 30 is too long. We need action right now. When can we expect the monitoring to end and real action to happen?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I indicated before, September 30 is the end date for this undertaking. I want to make it very clear that Direct Energy must always comply with the Fair Trading Act and the energy marketing regulations. This deadline is for implementing their action plan. There are very strict rules for door-to-door marketers on what they can and cannot do. The most simplistic answer with respect to contracts is that it's something that we have to look at, and that is what this undertaking is all about.

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

Carbon Monoxide Alarms

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Each year Albertans are affected by carbon monoxide poisoning, some tragically, and others are alerted to the threat by their home carbon monoxide alarm. My questions are to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. What are the requirements for carbon monoxide alarms in Alberta homes?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, carbon monoxide alarms are very much a valuable safety tool. The current building codes require these alarms to be in all new homes. That came into effect in September of 2007. The carbon monoxide alarms must be acceptable to the national quality standards of the Canadian safety code.

2:40

Mr. Sandhu: My second question is to the same minister. Can the minister tell us if the alarms are also required in existing homes or rental properties? Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I mentioned before, they are a very important safety tool. We recommend that owners of existing homes get carbon monoxide alarms as well. Buildings are subject to the codes in force when they are built. As such, safety codes are generally not retroactive. As to the other part of the question, rental properties are subject to the same codes as other homes.

The Speaker: The hon. member?

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that will conclude question period, then. That was 104 question and responses. We have two points of order arising out of it, that we'll deal with at the conclusion of the Routine.

In 30 seconds from now we will continue with the Routine.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Bill 46

Gunshot and Stab Wound Mandatory Disclosure Act

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to request leave to introduce Bill 46, the Gunshot and Stab Wound Mandatory Disclosure Act.

This act will make it mandatory for health care facilities and emergency medical technicians who treat gunshot or stab wounds to disclose to police the injured person's name, type of injury, and location of treatment. Bill 46 strikes a careful balance between patient privacy and public safety. Providing police with this important information helps them keep the public safe by preventing further violence, injuries, or death. It also gives health care professionals clarity regarding when disclosure is needed and when it is not.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 46 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 46 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. First, I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter from the Pochaiv maple leaf safe house project that I referred to earlier in my member's statement about human trafficking.

My second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is from the same organization. This document is an account of the human trafficking in Alberta panel that was aired on Alberta Primetime, Access TV, on April 27, 2009, at 7 p.m.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Just two quick tablings from my address with respect to Bill 204 yesterday, one dealing with the *Edmonton Sun* as referenced in my speech, another being a Facebook page dealing with that bill. I have five copies of each that I'll table with the page.

Thank you.

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

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three letters to table today. These letters are from Kenneth Ross, a senior who has received effective pain relief from chiropractic treatment over his lifetime, as well as from David Gurnett and Marilyn Bulat, both of whom attest to the benefits they have received from chiropractic care. They've written to express their opposition to delisting chiropractic services.

Thank you.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. I am on behalf of my colleague the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, the Leader of the Opposition, tabling correspondence he has received from Marianne Hart, who is also extolling the wonderful effects that she has experienced through chiropractic care and asking the government to stop the madness and step up and be a voice for everyone. She does not want to see this service delisted.

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 in this case 10 reports from long-term care workers indicating several specific problems on different shifts that were short-staffed. They indicate that some residents were left in bed far too long, received cold food because their meals were late, or were toileted too late.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Liepert, Minister of Health and Wellness, tabled during policy field committee consideration of the estimates of the Department of Health and Wellness on May 4, 2009, the Alberta Health Services strategic direction 2009-2012 consultation document and the health action plan annual report April 2009.

Also on behalf of the hon. Mr. Liepert, Minister of Health and Wellness, response to Written Question 10, asked for by Mr. Mason on April 6, 2009, and response to Written Question 13, asked for by Ms Notley on behalf of Mr. Mason on April 6, 2009.

Calendar of Special Events

The Speaker: Hon. members, before I get to the two points of order, it's now the 5th day of May. Normally, in the first opening days of any particular month I draw to the attention of all members what certain special weeks and special days occur in that particular month. May is the busiest month of the year.

May is Motorcycle and Bicycle Safety Awareness Month, Museum Month, Red Shield Appeal Month, Speech and Hearing Awareness Month, Cystic Fibrosis Awareness Month, Huntington Disease Awareness Month, Medic Alert Month, National Physiotherapy Month, Asian Heritage Month, Cerebral Palsy Awareness Month, Hemochromatosis Awareness Month. It's Leave a Legacy Month, Neurofibromatosis Awareness Month. It is also the time that the Green Ribbon of Hope campaign initiates itself.

April 25 to May 2 was National Immunization Awareness Week. April 26 to May 2 was Education Week in Alberta as it also was National Victims of Crime Awareness Week. April 27 to May 3 was International Astronomy Week. May 1 was Space Day. May 1 to May 7 is National Summer Safety Week. It's also Spinal Health Week. As all members will know, Saturday last, May 2, was World Naked Gardening Day. It was also International Astronomy Day.

Sunday, May 3, was World Laughter Day and World Press Freedom Day. May 3 was also the Annual Hike for Hospice Palliative Care.

May 3 to 9 is Emergency Preparedness Week. May 3 to 9 is also National Hospice Palliative Care Week. It's also International Composting Awareness Week, and it's also North American Occupational Health and Safety Week. May 4 was International Firefighters Day. The week of May 4 to 10 is National Mental Health Week. May 5 is World Asthma Day. May 5 is International Day of the Midwife. May 5 is Cinco de mayo. May 8 is World Red Cross Day as it is the Red Shield Annual Luncheon as it is International Thalassemia Day. May 8 and 9 is the Time of Remembrance and Reconciliation for Those Who Lost Their Lives during the Second World War. May 8 to 10 is the MS Carnation Campaign. May 9 is Kinsmen's Raise the Flag Day. It's also the Alberta Neurofibromatosis Association Tea. It is also World Fair Trade Day. May 10 is World Lupus Day as it is World Health Organization Move for Health Day as it is Mother's Day.

May 10 to 16 is National Police Week as it is Alberta Crime Prevention Week. May 11 to 17 is National Nursing Week. May 12 to 18 is National Road Safety Week. May 12 is International Nursing Day as it is Canada Health Day. May 12 is also National Myalgic Encephalomyelitis/Chronic Fatigue Syndrome and Fibromyalgia Syndrome Awareness Day. May 13 to 14 is the Provincial Skills Competition. May 15 is International Day of Families. May 17 is World Telecommunication and Information Society Day. It's also World Hypertension Day. It's also International Day against Homophobia.

May 17 to 23 is National Public Works Week as it also is Emergency Medical Services Awareness Week. May 18 is International Museum Day as it is Victoria Day. May 19 to 22 is Aboriginal Awareness Week. May 20 to 23 is the Canadian Skills Competition. May 21 is World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development. May 22 is International Day for Biological Diversity.

2:50

May 22 to June 19 is the Canadian Cancer Society Relay for Life. May 25 is National Missing Children's Day. May 25 to 31 is Week of Solidarity with the Peoples of Non-Self-Governing Territories. May 26 is National Day of Healing and Reconciliation. May 28 is National Multiple Births Awareness Day. May 28 from sunset to the nightfall of May 29 is Shavuot in the Jewish faith. May 29 is International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers. May 31 is World No Tobacco Day as it is the World Partnership Walk as it is the Great Strides Walk for Cystic Fibrosis. May 31 to June 6 is Canadian Environment Week.

That's just a brief list.

On a point of order, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Point of Order

Parliamentary Language

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The citations I'm using today are 23(h), (i), and (j), *Beauchesne* 409, 410, 417, and *Marleau and Montpetit* 431. The point of order is referring to an exchange between myself and the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit during question period in which – and I'll have to paraphrase this because, as usual, we don't have the benefit of the Blues – the minister said that a reasonable person would ask a reasonable question. He specifically named me as the Member for Edmonton-Centre as obviously not a reasonable person, so it was a direct comment on me. It was not a sort of general opinion expressed of all members or just a statement that he'd made. It specifically mentioned me, and it was a direct assertion that I was out of order or unreasonable.

The question that had been asked for which he gave the response was on the minister's willingness to cover costs that would be incurred as a result of proposed legislation. The minister insinuated – again, I'll refer to 23(h), (i), and (j) – that I as an individual was unreasonable. When I check for what that definition might be, it's saying: expressing some belief, action, fact, or event – so to be unreasonable would be the opposite of that – mental powers concerned with forming conclusions or inferences, sound judgment, clear or logical, judicious, rational, sensible.

This, I argue, was deliberate, and I believe that it contravenes 23(h), (i), and (j) as well as *Beauchesne* 417. *Beauchesne* 417 is around the answering of questions and notes that "answers to questions should be as brief as possible, deal with the matter raised and should not provoke debate." Of course, when you start making statements that are casting aspersions and insinuating that someone has problems with mental capacity, that's likely to provoke debate, Mr. Speaker.

You know, with careful choice of words, if the minister chose to take issue with the question, fair enough. But just because he doesn't like the question, there should not be an open ability for him to bully the questioner or to cast aspersions upon my character or mental capacity. The question itself was in order and met the test of *Beauchesne* 409, 410. As I've mentioned, it did offend 417. Finally, under *M and M* on page 431, Replies to Oral Questions: "replies are to be as brief as possible, to deal with the subject matter raised and to be phrased in language that does not provoke disorder."

I would argue that the minister was certainly welcome to take issue with the question and to decide not to answer it if he so chose, but I think it was unreasonable to take it a step further and to use the kind of language that he used in connection with the person that was asking the question, that being this individual.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would argue that he has offended me and the House with that point of order.

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, I used the word "unreasonable" in response to the question. I thought it was unreasonable that the member would think that the government would pay for the things that she was suggesting. Under *Beauchesne's* 488 when I look at it, it does not list the word "unreasonable" as unparliamentary language. Based on that and 417, talking about brevity, in this House I have seen many, many instances where brevity was not something that was coming from this hon. member.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Any additional on the point of order? We're going to have a citation, and we're going to be very specific. I'm not interested in opinions. I'm interested in dealing with the issue. The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Mr. Denis: Absolutely. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Just a couple of quick points. *Beauchesne's* 486(2) states that "an expression which is deemed to be unparliamentary today does not necessarily have to be deemed unparliamentary next week." That, to me, deals with intent. With respect to the minister's intent I would submit to this House that it was not malicious. He also did look at portions of unparliamentary language. As he mentioned, nowhere does it say that what he had mentioned is listed as unparliamentary language. I would also submit to this House that he did not mention a statement of fact but rather a statement of his own opinion. I did not pick up any malice there at all.

Those are my submissions, sir.

The Speaker: Are there others to participate? Hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, let's deal with a citation.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I would like to point out to the Speaker and to this House that the minister did not appear to have learned the lesson from *Beauchesne's* 28(g), (h), (i). He continued to pummel verbally the Member for Edmonton-Centre by again casting aspersions on her character, suggesting that, for example, she was long-winded or that she carried on overly important debate, in his opinion.

We are trying to create an atmosphere of decorum in this House. When it appears that the government is offended, they jump up very quickly to advocate on their behalf and say that they've been offended. It's a two-way street, Mr. Speaker, and I'm glad that you're the judge directing traffic. I look forward to your ruling.

The Speaker: Such statements of overfamiliarity, hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, do not put one in a better position. First of all, there is no such thing as the *Beauchesne* that you referred to. It could have been Standing Order 28. That's okay. We won't deal with that in a major way.

Look. Part of this is the result of an interpretation that I've given and an interpretation that we use in this House. We do some unique things in here. On Thursday of each week the Opposition House Leader rises and asks the government what might be on the Order Paper on a particular day. Somebody from the government, the Government House Leader, the Deputy Government House Leader, responds. We then print what is on the Order Paper for the business of the day.

It's customary that there not be debate in question period about legislation before the House. But the way it has been interpreted is that if the Order Paper says that a particular bill is to come up, then I presume all members in the Assembly would look at that. In this case on Wednesday, May 6, it says that Bill 44, I believe, which is the intended bill that was being discussed today, will come up tomorrow. It's pretty much fair game between the time at which the bill is introduced and the time it actually enters second reading to allow questions in question period with respect to this, which I have done consistently. Some members find this quite offensive. They think that as soon as you introduce the bill, that eliminates any opportunity in the question period to do that. That is not the case. So the subject matter is in fact fair game. But tomorrow, because the Order Paper basically says that on Wednesday, May 6, Bill 44 will be up, you'd be hard pressed to find myself to allow questions with respect to it in the question period because it's now identified to come up.

3:00

So we have questions. Okay. It's very, very clear that a series of questions came up today with respect to this particular bill, and on one occasion the chair intervened and basically said that if the question has to do with a legal opinion, it should not be raised. Now, from the chair's position – and the chair very attentively looked at the questions and heard the questions raised by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre – he's quite hard pressed not to believe that they were seeking legal interpretation of one sort or the other.

Just to refer for all members' attention, 408(1)(c) says a question should “not require an answer involving a legal opinion.” It's repeated again in *Beauchesne* 409(1) and (3), and at *Beauchesne* 411(1) pretty much the same thing, that we should not be dealing with legal interpretations.

I suspect the hon. minister by the third question in was getting, well, frustrated is the word that I will use – it may not be at all; it may be the demeanor of the minister or what have you in attempting to find a response – at which point in time a question that could have

been ruled out by another chair but not by this one was permitted today even though it went on to the question of interpretation. The hon. minister said, and this is what the Blues say: “Reasonable people ask reasonable questions. The opposition member opposite obviously isn't one of those.” There's pretty clear intention in there to suggest that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre is not reasonable.

Well, while it may not be an appropriate response, it doesn't make it unparliamentary. However, while it may not necessarily constitute a point of order, I want to provide a reminder that I think that we can avoid a lot of these interpretation difficulties if we don't ask for legal interpretations at any time. Secondly, we try to avoid getting involved in debate. That's a submission made to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre and others and to the minister. Even though this may not necessarily be unparliamentary, I would ask the minister to exercise some care in how he addresses colleagues in this House. That's a statement to all members.

That matter is dealt with. We will now go on to the second one. The second one comes from the Minister of Health and Wellness.

Point of Order Allegations against a Member

Mr. Liepert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise under Standing Order 23(h) and (i), which says:

A Member will be called to order by the Speaker if, in the Speaker's opinion, that Member . . .

(h) makes allegations against another Member;

(i) imputes false or unavowed motives to another Member.

Mr. Speaker, in question period today the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar asked me a question. I do not have the Blues in front of me, but it went something like this: what instructions did I as minister give to Alberta Health Services relative to individual layoffs? My answer was: none. The member then went on to preface his next supplementary with a comment something like: that's not what I heard.

Those comments by the member clearly allege that the information I provided to this House was somehow incorrect or that somehow I was misleading this Assembly. Now, there was a great fanfare made before this legislative session started by the Leader of the Opposition on how we needed to treat others within this House with respect. I would suggest that this member should be called to order, acknowledge that the information that I provided to this House in answer to his question was in fact the truth. Unless he has information he can table otherwise, I would suggest, Mr. Speaker, that you rule that he withdraw those comments and apologize to this Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, did you wish to participate?

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Certainly, Mr. Speaker. I would stand and indicate that there is absolutely no point of order here. I am certainly entitled to my opinion. I'm entitled to do my research, as is the hon. minister of health. Now, the minister of health may be sensitive, but I would remind the minister and all members of this House that in question period I talked about the strategic direction that Alberta Health Services is going in. I talked specifically about a document that I suppose I could say was tabled on Dr. Duckett's Alberta Health Services blog. It's a public document, and it indicates clearly that the priorities of this strategic plan are priorities that address goals established by the government of Alberta, established by the ministry of health, and aligned with Vision 2020, which is a document that I have before me that came out in December of 2008.

So there is nothing untoward here. As a member of the opposition it is my job, it is my duty, it is my obligation to stand up and ask questions. These are very important matters, and if the minister is not interested in answering them, then he does not have to. But certainly I am entitled – in fact, I, again, have an obligation – to ask questions, and that’s precisely what I was doing.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others to participate?

Shall we deal with this matter, then? Okay. This matter has been raised. The text, essentially, is the following. A question was raised about purported layoffs. The response from the hon. minister was, “None, Mr. Speaker.” Then the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar said: “Thank you. That certainly is interesting. That’s not what I heard.” At which point in time the minister said, “Point of order, Mr. Speaker.” That’s the full gist of the text that we have in *Hansard*.

There is a citation in *Beauchesne* which has been used time and time again. It has been referred to time and time again by the chair in the past. It’s under Acceptance of the Word of a Member, and it’s *Beauchesne* 494.

It has been formally ruled by Speakers that statements [made] by Members respecting themselves and particularly within their own knowledge must be accepted. It is not unparliamentary temperately to criticize statements made by Members as being contrary to the facts; but no imputation of intentional falsehood is permissible. On rare occasions this may result in the House having to accept two contradictory accounts of the same incident.

We’ve heard explanation here with respect to this. It strikes me that if I look at these words, maybe some sensitivity, but I do not believe that in here I can find imputation of character assassination. So we’re moving on.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 24

Animal Health Amendment Act, 2009

[Adjourned debate April 21: Mr. Griffiths]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright, Bill 24.

Mr. Griffiths: I was done.

The Speaker: Okay. Anybody else to participate? We’re on Bill 24. The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright had 18 minutes left in his speaking time, but we’ll recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview. Bill 24.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is an interesting bill to come up at this moment in history, when there’s so much concern and interest about the H1N1 influenza, which everybody knows can be carried by humans, can be carried by swine, and there’s at least a little bit of evidence of cross-infection not from the meat itself but from the live animals and, interestingly, from humans to animals, it appears. This bill, Bill 24, I imagine, if it were in place right now, would be probably being actively used or, certainly, actively examined to help manage the situation that we’re facing in Alberta concerning the H1N1 virus and the isolation of a swine production facility as well as the isolation of a number of human beings.

3:10

One of the points I want to make with this bill – and I’m actually going to register a little bit of concern about process here; it may be that as things go along, I can be corrected on this – is that my reading of the bill is that it actually amends a piece of legislation that was enacted just a few months ago. Under the original version of the Animal Health Act, which Bill 24 will now amend, there presumably must have been a number of shortcomings because we have now in Bill 24, a mere five months after the original Animal Health Act was proclaimed and enacted, quite a hefty bunch of amendments.

I wouldn’t have been surprised if there were a couple of minor corrections or adjustments, but Bill 24 presents us with some 25 pages or so of amendments to an act that has only been in place five months. It makes me wonder why that original act had so many problems in it. Was it drafted in a terrific hurry? Were there shortcomings in how it was drafted in that perhaps adequate thought wasn’t given to it? Perhaps the proper stakeholders weren’t consulted, or perhaps the government just wasn’t up to the job of drafting a good piece of legislation. That’s something I had looked for.

The other explanation is that the world has changed so quickly that this legislation had to come forward, but I’m hard pressed to think that that’s the case. It would be something to hear explained in second or in committee why this has happened. The reason I would look for that explanation is so that we don’t do it again, so that we figure out next time that a bill can actually last more than five months without getting so many amendments.

With that having been said on the process, I think that this is a bill that, from our understanding of it, is going to make sense. The effect of this will be to give the animal health system and in many ways the public health system a broader range of tools to act more quickly in times of crisis. It broadens things like the definition of animals and livestock, and it should make our system of protecting animal and human health that much more fleet footed and adaptable and comprehensive and responsive. The need for that is being demonstrated hour by hour as we’re sitting through this session of the Legislature.

I’m sure all our thoughts are with the child who has been hospitalized with the H1N1 virus, and our thoughts would also be with his or her family. We all hope and pray that it doesn’t go beyond this and that this doesn’t turn into something much more serious. If it does, we may be using this legislation more quickly than we ever expected.

A handful of other comments on this bill, Mr. Speaker. As well as expanding the definition of animals and livestock, it addresses the definition of diseases. It amends and clarifies issues regarding food-producing animals that are being illegally fed nonrendered animal carcasses. It gives various powers to inspectors and clarifies those so that their role and responsibilities and authority are clarified. It addresses a few questions concerning the chief provincial veterinarian, who, I should note, took the time to meet with me and some of our staff to discuss this bill, and that was much appreciated.

Mr. Speaker, I think that this bill, while it raises some questions about the drafting of its predecessor, is a good bill, it’s timely, and I expect it’ll get the full support of the Official Opposition.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Other members to participate?

Shall I call on the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright to conclude the debate?

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will address most of the questions that have been raised here in second reading in Committee

of the Whole. I'd just like to remind members that given the current situation with animal health and the regulations that have been adopted, we have continued to consult with the industry in the adoption of the remaining regulations. Because of the regulations being written, some changes needed to be made to the bill. We've also had to in a couple of circumstances synchronize the wording to better comply with federal legislation, which continues to evolve as well.

I look forward to debate in Committee of the Whole. With that, I would call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 24 read a second time]

Bill 25

Teachers' Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2009

[Adjourned debate April 22: Mr. Snelgrove]

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

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and join second reading debate on Bill 25, the Teachers' Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2009. I think there are a few people on this side of the House who would like to speak to this act, so I won't take a great long period of time. I'm going to speak very favourably to the act by and large. This bill will fully implement the teachers' unfunded pension liability agreement that was proposed by the government in November of 2007 and ratified by all 62 school boards on February 1, 2008. This bill will legally transfer the entire unfunded liability from pre-1992 to the government effective September 1 of this year and will incorporate changes to the payment and governance arrangements pertaining to the pre-1992 unfunded liability. We've dealt with a couple of previous bills put forward in the implementation of the pension agreement to deal with payment schedules and transferring the authority of payment to the management of the finance minister. This is going to complete the process, and it's the right thing to do.

The pre-1992 unfunded pension liability is up to about \$7 billion. The teachers' portion of that was just a little over \$2 billion. The very unfortunate and, I think, frankly, dangerous effect of allowing the teachers to continue being responsible for one-third of the unfunded liability was that teachers were paying ever-larger percentages of their pay back into their pension fund, about 12 per cent as opposed to around 7 or 8 per cent for teachers in most other provinces, and it was getting difficult to recruit and retain good teachers in the province of Alberta. Essentially, what we were asking our teachers to do in recent years was to fund the pension liability of previous teachers so that they were funding pensions for teachers already retired and would never see the benefit of the money that they were putting into this pension fund themselves.

As I said, Mr. Speaker, I think it was the right thing to do, a sensible thing to do, and it could be a brilliant thing to do, now that the government through this legislation wants and, if passed, will take over the pre-1992 unfunded liability in its entirety, if the government develops a good strategy for making that unfunded liability shrink in a timely fashion.

3:20

We're looking at \$7 billion here. You know, there have been quite a few numbers kicked around going back to before the government announced plans to take over the unfunded pension liability. Some of those were announced by the Alberta Teachers' Association. Their projections were that the funding scheme in place under the 1992 pension agreement would have seen the

unfunded liability increase each year until it topped out at about \$14 billion, about double what it is today, in 2045, after which it will rapidly diminish until it is eliminated by 2060.

Of course, there are debt servicing costs involved with a debt like that as well. Again, according to the Teachers' Association, if you let it go to 2060 and pay it out according to the model in the 1992 agreement, the cost of that thing was going to be about \$46 billion. So if we paid off the \$7 billion in unfunded liability in one fell swoop today, we would save the taxpayers approximately \$40 billion over the next 55 years.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I don't know if the finance minister – this is not something that we really talked about in finance estimates. If you look at the budget figures, I think you will find an unfunded teachers' pension plan liability line item in there. I'm sorry; I don't have the estimates right in front of me, but there is a line item in there that I think amounts to about \$355 million, \$356 million for this year. I see the finance minister is nodding her head in agreement, so I'm pretty close on the numbers anyway. My reading of that number, by the way, is that what's in the budget estimates for fiscal '09-10 is about one-third larger than the forecast and the estimate for fiscal '08-09, which suggests that what we're seeing in that figure is simply the effect of the government taking over the one-third of the unfunded liability that had been the teachers' responsibility.

Now, this is a bit of a stretch because I'm projecting, and perhaps the finance minister could give some clarification to this, if not now, then at committee as well. If I'm projecting here correctly, it would seem to indicate from a cursory glance at those numbers that although the government is prepared to take over the unfunded liability in total, it hasn't come up with a repayment strategy that's going to pay this thing down any faster.

Now, the finance minister and I and the President of the Treasury Board and I have had some fairly lengthy discussions and debate around the estimates thus far. We know what times are going to be like to some extent. We think we know, and we hope they're not going to be any worse than what they've forecasted for the coming fiscal year and the two planning years beyond that. We know what's being proposed to be done with the sustainability fund to turn that into a much bigger fund so that there's enough money to cover off the deficits that are anticipated over the next few fiscal years. Everybody is keeping their fingers crossed that this thing doesn't get any worse than it is and that we have a rather quick and rather sharp recovery. The minister and I have had some discussions about whether that's realistic or not. We shall see in the fullness of time. So I doubt very much that there's, you know, any place, any nook, any cranny where \$7 billion happens to be hiding this year that the minister can take and simply dump into the plan.

But, again, the trick to making this work to the advantage of not only the teachers of Alberta and by extension the children of Alberta but to the taxpayers of Alberta is to get after this debt, this unfunded liability, which as of September 1 will be, if this legislation passes, part of the public debt. Get after it, and pay it down as quickly as possible. Really, in terms of details I suppose that at committee is the appropriate time to hear details of what the repayment plan will be. Although I leave it to the finance minister to decide when she wants to reveal that, I hope that she will. I hope that she will contribute to the discussion that way because I think that really is a key part of this legislation.

On paper it's a great bill. On paper it does the right thing. On paper it is going to create a situation which should make it far more attractive to recent graduates of education programs both in our own universities here in Alberta and universities all across the country, down into the United States, and around the world, for that matter,

to want to come and be great teachers here because they know that they can focus on being great teachers and not have to worry about how much of their paycheque is going into these long-standing obligations. But there is that little matter of how fast we're going to pay back the debt. Other than that, though, I'm fully in support of it myself.

I know some of my colleagues want to speak to this. I suspect others from other parties do as well. So I'll take my seat now and look forward to further discussion at committee stage and response from the minister at some point.

Thank you.

Speaker's Ruling Members Absenting Themselves

The Speaker: Hon. members, before I recognize an additional member, it's not often that I will intervene with respect to this kind of a debate, but I do want to draw to all members' attention Standing Order 33, which deals with pecuniary interest. This is a bill that deals with pensions of a select group of people in the province of Alberta. There is benefit to be derived to those individuals as a result of this particular piece of legislation.

Pecuniary interest says the following:

33(1) No member is entitled to vote on any question in which the Member has a direct pecuniary interest, and the vote of any Member so interested will be disallowed.

(2) If a Member has a direct pecuniary interest in a matter to be voted on, the Member shall declare the interest to the Assembly and leave the Chamber before the vote is taken.

Now, one can extrapolate in here the whole question of debate with respect to this matter. It's whether or not it's self-serving for an hon. member who might benefit very directly from this either now or in the future to then participate in the debate as well as going the next step to voting.

This is a very serious matter. It's not often that I make this kind of comment. I make it here because of the very specific nature of the bill before the Assembly at this time and the dollar implication of it. I have to believe the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie has no pecuniary interest in this – neither he nor his direct spouse is an educator – but I do make this now. So I say this: I will not rule any member out. The members will be guided by their consciences as to how they choose to participate in this debate.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Debate Continued

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I very much appreciate the cautions provided by the Speaker. As a retired teacher, although I no longer contribute to the pension, I am a recipient of it, and that pension is adjusted on an annual basis. Therefore, when it comes to the vote, I'll make sure that I absent myself so as not to cause any confusion. However, the fact that I was a teacher in a former life I don't believe prevents me from speaking on behalf of Albertans.

The Speaker: Please, I want to make it very clear what I said. If there is a direct benefit to a member, the member goes forward with his own responsibility and caution. That's all I'm saying.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I'm pleased that you requalified it and left it to my conscience to decide. I don't believe that I have the personal persuasive powers to change the outcome one way or the other.

My comments are that this is sort of the implementation state of what was a very positive piece of legislation. I would suggest, Mr. Speaker, that it was as positive for the government as it was for

teachers, for students, and for parents across this province. I would like to think that the reasons for bringing forward this legislation were purely altruistic, but the reality is that by living up to the obligations that the province had basically dragged its heels on for a 30-year period, the government averted the potential of a province-wide strike. The government did the right thing by taking over the unfunded pension liability. It created labour peace for five years. It tied any increases in salary to the weekly average. It also made a connection not only for teachers through the agreement but for staff, including caretakers, so that anyone dealing with a support function within the education system would be considered under that same weekly average. That was a very positive undertaking.

3:30

As the Member for Calgary-Currie previously mentioned, the longer we deal with paying down this debt, the greater it becomes. In order to service the debt, the province is basically required to pay in the neighbourhood of about \$83 million just to keep the debt from growing substantially larger. The interest continues to grow on that \$7 billion figure.

Now, it's important to note that this government has decided to undertake a deficit of approximately \$4.7 billion. When you add another 7 billion plus dollars of the unfunded liability, and then you add another \$10 billion of public infrastructure deficit, at least \$1.5 billion of which the Education minister agreed was the amount on defrayed infrastructure for schools, what you are seeing there alone, is \$21 billion of debt. To that we need to add another \$1.5 billion, at least, for other unfunded pension liabilities that the government has the responsibility for undertaking.

While this is very successful, it is important that the government come up with some type of savings plan which will allow it to keep up with its debt payments and also prevent our deficit/debt from growing. At this point, Mr. Speaker, we're almost back at the point of \$23 billion in debt, which was reduced to a large extent on the backs of public employees.

I look forward to this bill being discussed further, Mr. Speaker, and I will take you up on your suggestion, and I will absent myself until after the vote has occurred. Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I congratulate the hon. member for wanting to absent himself from the vote, thereby acknowledging that he has a conflict of interest in the situation. Doesn't he find it somewhat untoward and self-serving to then participate in the debate? I'm shocked, hon. member, and perhaps you could answer that.

Mr. Chase: I'd be glad to answer that question. It doesn't affect my benefits whatsoever. This will affect the current employees, especially the young teachers who have been servicing this debt for years and years and years. It does not affect me monetarily. I do not benefit from this. Whether the government decided to pay off this pension or not, my pension is secure because of the good management of the Alberta Teachers' Association in terms of the pension fund. It may not be as successful as the Ontario teachers' fund, but it is managed, and I won't benefit from this. Also, it's important to point out that I was a teacher. I am now the elected representative of Calgary-Varsity constituency, approximately 35,000 to 40,000 members of which will be paying for this unfunded liability. If I were not to speak on behalf of my constituents, I would be abdicating my responsibility.

I hope that has clarified the concerns, but if any other individuals within the 29(2)(a) process would like further clarification, I'll be glad to do so. I'll stay around for that time.

Ms Evans: Well, it's a very good point in debate, Mr. Speaker, and I thank you very much for illuminating it so that we can all have a full understanding of it. There's conflict of interest in direct or indirect pecuniary interest, and there's always a wide-held perception by people that if you are still held as a member of the group that received, for whatever reason, a pension from the Alberta Teachers' Association, including my mother as a widow of a teacher who died many years ago, in some way you are still connected with the policy-making body that can affect or can benefit from the kinds of activity we're engaged in.

I, like the Member for Peace River, would have been interested in the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity's impression of that because while you continue to hold that right to receive monies from that group, there's certainly an inference, a perception that the benefit that accrues to the group as a whole – their opportunity to give X amount of dollars for COLA clauses in the future – is impacted somewhat by the decisions we're making today. It's that COLA and the establishment of that that I think would serve you well to remember and to be absent.

I am surprised that you hadn't chosen to before you spoke, but I'm glad to hear your intention to leave now, and I'm glad to note further that other members have absented themselves. I don't think anyone in this Legislative Assembly wants to do something that places into conflict or into question by the electorate en masse out there in Alberta that we try to do things in a very above board fashion.

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I want to make some comments and then perhaps make a suggestion to members of the House.

The Speaker: Well, we are on Standing Order 29(2)(a), the question-and-comment period.

Mr. Renner: I want to make a motion, but I'll wait, perhaps, until other members who wish to participate at this stage have done so. Then I would like to make a motion with respect to the debate under way.

The Speaker: Well, we've just lost 15 seconds of the hon. member's time.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Based on the fact that your mother was a teacher and you stand to potentially inherit, does that not put you in a similar conflict of interest? It's a question of how far the conflict goes? If we had a brother or a sister or a mother . . .

Ms Evans: She's the widow of a teacher.

Mr. Chase: Okay. Well, I'm just saying that if there is a teacher connection in your family, then possibly – do you see what I'm saying? How extreme do you take the connection before you absent yourself?

The Speaker: Hon. members, we have now exhausted the time associated with that.

Hon. Deputy Government House Leader, I'm sorry. You have to help me. What do you mean "a motion"?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that there appears to be some concern among a number of members as to whether individuals are

or are not in conflict, I would just like to move that we adjourn debate on this bill pending some clarification from the Ethics Commissioner so that we can all participate in good conscience or not as the case may be. There are a number of members who may find themselves in a similar position.

The Speaker: So the hon. member who basically has joined the debate is now adjourning the debate. He has now given his shot in the debate. Do I take it that if the Assembly agrees, the hon. Deputy Government House Leader will be contacting the Ethics Commissioner for a ruling in this regard, or is the expectation that the chair should?

Mr. Renner: I don't care who does it, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps it might be appropriate for the chair to do so.

The Speaker: The chair would be happy to do it anyway.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

3:40

Bill 33 Fiscal Responsibility Act

[Adjourned debate April 28: Ms Evans]

The Speaker: Hon. Minister of Finance and Enterprise, do you choose to continue?

Ms Evans: No.

The Speaker: Okay. The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, then.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is, again, an honour to get up and be able to join debate on Bill 33, the Fiscal Responsibility Act, in second reading. This is the bill that changes the rules around the legislated fiscal framework for the government in the province of Alberta. This is the bill that allows the government to run deficits. This is the bill that permits deficits if offset by transfers from the sustainability fund. This is the bill that reworks the sustainability fund sufficiently to allow it to have enough money in it to pay off those deficits for the next three or four fiscal years. This is the bill that anticipates that most of that money, in fact, will be needed to cover those operating deficits because it anticipates that we will be running operating deficits for the next three fiscal years, maybe four.

In fact, the budget anticipates that things might be worse than actually projected in that the budget refers to a \$2 billion fiscal correction that could happen sometime during this fiscal year in time for next fiscal year if things don't start to recover in time. That, Mr. Speaker, would be necessary most likely because even with the way Bill 33 proposes to rework the sustainability fund, there wouldn't be enough money in that particular piggy bank to cover the deficits that we would run if a worst-case scenario than what the budget projects actually comes to pass.

How things have changed in the space of a year. Boy. Less than a year ago the finance minister was talking about the possibility that we would run an 8 and a half billion dollar surplus for fiscal '08-09. It didn't work out that way. By the way, I'm not blaming the finance minister for the fact that it didn't work out that way. I don't know what her math marks were like in school, but I'm not blaming her for getting the math wrong. This undoubtedly is a global economic meltdown, a global credit crisis, a global rhubarb patch that we've all driven the fiscal automobile into.

As Ann Landers used to say when she wrote that advice column that used to appear in the newspapers back in the day when people

actually used to read newspapers by getting them delivered to their houses rather than just going online to get them: when the good Lord hands you lemons, make lemonade. We've been handed a lemon. Maybe we've been handed two lemons here, actually. We've been handed a whole bushel of lemons in terms of where the economy is going and has gone, and we've been handed another lemon in terms of Bill 33, I think.

Bill 33 permits deficits if offset by transfers from the sustainability fund. It continues to disallow borrowing for operating purposes while allowing borrowing for capital purposes and borrowing by self-supporting corporations. That was allowed and will continue to be allowed. In-year operating expense increases are limited to 1 per cent of budgeted total ministry operating expenses. Here's where we start getting into trouble, Mr. Speaker. The limitation on the amount of nonrenewable resource revenue that can be directly used for budget purposes: bye, bye. That one is gone. The sustainability fund is being expanded to include the assets of the capital account, the amounts set aside for carbon capture and storage, the amounts set aside for Green TRIP. Add it all together, and it comes up to about \$17 billion.

You know what? The only control in here on what you can do with the money, other than you have to use it to offset operating deficits because borrowing to cover operating deficits would still be against the law, is that the balance in the sustainability fund cannot be an amount less than zero. So the sustainability fund can't run a deficit. Wow. Knock me over with a feather.

Mr. Speaker, I'm sorry. That is just not good enough. The \$2.5 billion that was required to remain in the sustainability fund as a contingency for natural disasters, unforeseen emergencies: that's been eliminated. The notion of how we sustain the sustainability fund is just kind of vague and airy: well, you know, when the fiscal situation improves – we think that's going to happen in 2012-2013 – well, then when we're running surpluses, cash available from the surpluses will be saved in the sustainability fund until the fund's balance reaches \$10 billion again.

This is essentially the first plank in the province's savings strategy, the province says. The province does not say what the second or third or fourth planks are. My goodness, Mr. Speaker. I have questioned the minister of finance, the minister responsible for Treasury Board, the Premier, anybody else over there whom I can question, repeatedly since budget day, as to what the other planks are. There are no other planks. This plank is sort of sticking out perpendicular to the side of the ship like, you know, it's a pirate ship, just inviting us to all walk off the plank and go splashing into the ocean of red ink.

There's no control anymore, and goodness knows, Mr. Speaker, there wasn't much control to begin with. Back in 2003 the government introduced Bill 2, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, which included amendments to the Fiscal Responsibility Act as it existed then. Those amendments created the sustainability fund, which, by the way, was originally a Liberal idea. Those amendments also created the capital account.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

That bill also introduced a cap of \$3.5 billion for how much nonrenewable resource revenue could be spent before having to be transferred into the sustainability fund. You know, when you get to 3.5 billion and 1 dollars, the \$1 gets transferred into the sustainability fund and on like that. There was some understanding even then, in 2003, that we shouldn't spend all our capital, that that might be a good idea since once we get the money from the oil and gas that

comes out of the ground – that oil and gas is gone, and if we spend the money that we made from that oil and gas, it's gone for all time, too.

So \$3.5 billion initially. In 2004 the government amended the Fiscal Responsibility Act to increase the cap on spending nonrenewable resource revenue to \$4 billion. In 2005 the government amended the fiscal responsibility act yet again to increase the cap to \$4.75 billion. In 2006 the government amended the Fiscal Responsibility Act to increase the cap on spending nonrenewable resource revenue to \$5.3 billion. And now it's gone altogether. Now it's just gone.

The government is removing the only legislative limit they had on spending all the resource revenue that they collect. In my view, in my opinion, they're taking a gamble by removing the \$2.5 billion natural disaster contingency amount, too. There's nothing set aside for anything except it's all set aside to offset operating deficits that will be rung up this year and may continue to be rung up next year and the year after and – who knows? – the year after that. Because we've all seen it happen in this country often enough at the federal level, at the provincial level in this province, and at the provincial level in just about every other province, Mr. Speaker, we all know that once you start down the road of running operating deficits, it's a tough road to get off of. So we don't really know where we're going with all this.

3:50

In essence, Mr. Speaker, what we are saying with Bill 33 is that we're going to get our hands on every bit of money that we can in short-term savings, or short-term set-asides, in this province, we're going to lump it all together into one big emergency fund, and then we're going to start spending that emergency fund until, God willing and the creek don't rise, the economy starts to turn around or we run out of money in the emergency fund.

There is no plan to embark on a multilevel savings and investment strategy that involves replenishing some of these savings in the short term, that involves continuing to save short term to continue to have an emergency fund that involves investing for the long term, that involves the notion that if we were a family we'd be saying: "Okay. Dad's lost his job, and Mom is working part-time, but we've still got to save for the kids' college education someday, you know, 18, 19, 20 years down the road, and we'd better be trying to put a little something away for our retirement. Oh, yes, we also have to pay the mortgage. We can't afford a new roof, but we've got to patch the leaky spots in it, and stuff like that."

I mean, when you're a family and especially when you're a family of limited means, what we sometimes refer to as a SITCOM family – single income, two children, outrageous mortgage – the world doesn't care that you don't have all that much money or that this year is a little rougher than last year. You've still got to meet your current obligations, your monthly and daily expenses; you've got to pay down your debt.

We were just talking in Bill 25 about adding \$7 billion to public debt, and rightly we should, in the unfunded teachers' pension liability, and you've got to save for the future. All this does is say: "Okay. Let's get our hands on every penny and dime and quarter and nickel that fell through the cushions of the couch, and let's look behind the fridge to see if the cat knocked any loonies back there. We're going to put it into a piggy bank. Then we're going to get a hammer, and we're going to smash the piggy bank, and we're going to start spending that money to meet our shortfall." That's not good enough. That's not nearly good enough.

There is no strategy here. There is just pure naked fear, as far as I'm concerned, pure naked terror coupled with hope that bears a

passing resemblance to, you know, Saul's conversion on the road to Damascus, a hope for one of those "Aha" religious moments where we can suddenly go: "There, I've seen the sign. The economy is getting better. The recession is over. We're not as deep in the glue as we feared we might be." I wouldn't run my family's finances on a foundation that shaky. I know the Member for Edmonton-Riverview and the Member for Calgary-McCall wouldn't run their family's finances on a foundation that shaky. I suspect there are even a few members in the government that wouldn't run their family's finances on a foundation that shaky.

This great province of Alberta is a family of 3 and a half million people who rely on us not to mess it up, not to put it in the rhubarb, not to drive it off a cliff, to be prudent, to be visionary [interjection] and to ignore the hackles and the heckles and the chirping from the little sparrow from Calgary-West across the way there, and to do some responsible, prudent fiscal planning. [interjection] That was a good sparrow imitation, not as good as the Member for Calgary-West but not bad.

We're failing them in this. We're absolutely failing them in this. What the government seeks to do in Bill 33, Mr. Speaker, is give itself kind of an all-encompassing get out of jail free card that allows them to continue spending irresponsibly, to continue spending without having gone through any more of an exercise in value-for-money audit or seeking of efficiencies than the stated – they're looking for \$215 million in savings over the next 12 months out of a \$37 billion budget. I think they can do better than that, but that's all they're looking for.

This is not a government that is taking seriously the need to prioritize its planning and its spending and reallocate spending and investment so that the spending goes to the projects and programs that will benefit the people in the province of Alberta and the investment goes to long-term investments that will enrich the people in the province of Alberta and get us off this roller-coaster ride of volatile oil and gas resource revenue prices and amounts so that we can ride out the storm better in the future. This is a short-term, myopic solution to a problem that calls for some long-term vision. It just in no way, as far as I'm concerned, passes the test of good, prudent fiscal management.

I think, Mr. Speaker, that that's part of the reason why the voters of Calgary-Currie put me here, why the voters of the 82 other constituencies in this province put the rest of you here: to be prudent fiscal managers and good stewards of this province's wealth. We all, all of us who didn't come here post-1993, all of us sacrificed and suffered and went through pain, some more than others, when it became necessary to slay the deficit, balance the budget, and try and get this province out of debt. We owe it to the people of Alberta who were here then and to the people of Alberta who have come here since not to set them up for having to go through that again.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that this piece of legislation, Bill 33, as enabling legislation for this year's budget does exactly that. It sets us up to go down the road that we went down all through the '80s, really, and it sets us up to again have to come to grips in a way that we came to grips in the early '90s with the financial mess we had gotten ourselves into. We have time to do it differently. I hope that we have the collective will to do it differently. There's no way, in my mind, that this piece of legislation can go forward without significant amendments, and at the appropriate time we will be bringing forward amendments on this bill.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I think my time is just about up. I will take my seat and allow others to join the debate, perhaps even the sparrow from Calgary-West.

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

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciated that. I appreciated the comments from the Member for Calgary-Currie. They were a good opening analysis. I wonder about the name of this act, frankly: the Fiscal Responsibility Act. I think that by the time we're done, it could have all kinds of names. It could be the fiscal non-responsibility act or the fiscal irresponsibility act or the fiscal cross your fingers act or who knows what? I'm sure it'll get more and more creative.

I cannot think of a bigger symbol of the hollow agenda of this government in the last 15 years than this particular piece of legislation. The simple fact of the matter is that through the 1990s, as natural gas prices were surging and natural resource revenues were climbing, it was actually pretty easy after the first couple of years of the so-called Klein revolution to run surpluses, and it was easy to stick with the original Fiscal Responsibility Act. It's only now, six months after the price of oil and gas drops, that suddenly the commitment to balanced budgets is out the window. Frankly, it makes we really wonder what that whole campaign to pay off the debt was really about. What was that really for? I think Albertans are increasingly aware that a mere two or three years after the mortgage was burned, we're going back into debt. What the heck is this about? If we're so readily prepared on such short notice to toss out that kind of discipline, then why did we put so much effort into the last 15 years?

4:00

In many ways I think, Mr. Speaker, a lot of what happened in the last 15 years, through the 1990s, was deeply misguided and deeply damaging. I think that every time I drive a road in Alberta that's in dismal disrepair because we deferred maintenance, and now we're having to spend substantially more to repair those roads. I think that every time I get a call from a constituent who has experienced 12- or 24-hour or even multiday waits in emergency rooms because they're short of staff and short of facilities. I think back to the moves in the 1990s to lay off over 10,000 health care workers and to reduce our training capacity for nurses and doctors and to sell two hospitals in Calgary, to blow up what was then the largest hospital in Calgary.

All of those things and so much more were undertaken in the name of balancing the budget and paying off the debt. Now this government has the nerve, six months after the price of oil and gas drops, to bring in legislation and say: "Forget all of that. That was all just then, and this is now. Just get over it. Forget your history. Forget all the blunders we've made, and stay with the program." Well, Mr. Speaker, I find that offensive. I find that demeaning. I find it insulting. Worst of all, I think it's a sign of extremely bad management on the part of this government.

What were all those cutbacks really about? What was the boom all about, folks? Think this through. Fifteen years of multibillion dollar surpluses and six months after natural resource prices drop, we're into this. Is this the best you people can do? Is this what you consider managing Alberta's wealth effectively? Because it sure isn't what I consider it. How could we be so exposed, after so much wealth has flowed through this treasury, to the forces of debt and cutback? How could we even be considering internal memos coming through from top medical people in the system putting freezes on recruitments? How could we be considering standing here today while children across the river, sick and injured children, are being treated in a tent? What the heck has gone on with you people in the last 15 years? Where have you taken Alberta, and how did you get us so exposed to a drop in oil and natural gas prices, Mr. Speaker?

This is, I think, a shocking betrayal of the hollow agenda of a government that is inept in managing public finances. Time and

time again over the years we and the Alberta Chambers of Commerce, the Institute of Chartered Accountants, Canada West Foundation, Jack Mintz at the commission of this own government, and many others have said: get a savings plan in place. As the Member for Calgary-Currie has quite rightly pointed out, we're still waiting for any meaningful plan.

How is it that after all of that money the heritage fund is worth significantly less today than it was 20 years ago? If we were to adjust for the larger population and inflation, we'd find that it was worth far less today than 20 years ago. In those 20 years that have passed, we've pumped out literally hundreds of billions of dollars of nonrenewable resource wealth. It's gone. We have less savings in place than we did 20 years ago, and we're heading back into debt.

I think this is shameful. I think that there needs to be some serious soul-searching taking place among the members of this government about the long-term future of Alberta. There is no savings plan, and when we have the government's own report, written by Jack Mintz and a blue-ribbon panel with clearly a right-wing leaning – this is not some, you know, left-wing or even Liberal group of people; Jack Mintz and the others were hand-picked by the former finance minister. When they come up and they say, "What this government is doing is unsustainable," and this government and current minister of finance try to bury that report, release it on a day when it's going to get lost to the media, brush it aside, I think the long term of this province is actually in some serious jeopardy, and I think events in the world are going to overtake the carbon-based economy that's given Alberta its prosperity.

History, as I've said many times, is filled with examples of economies and societies that are based on commodities going boom and then going bust and never recovering. I'm afraid that we're beginning to see that play out. There will be some recovery, no doubt, but each recovery from here on in is going to be weaker and shallower and shorter than the previous one, and each downturn is going to be deeper and longer and harder to get out. As that downward wave continues, we're going to dig ourselves further and further into debt, and we do this led by a government that has no strategy. Debt is not on its own necessarily bad, Mr. Speaker, but it needs to be managed in the context of a bigger strategy. This government doesn't have a strategy, and it's shocking and dismal.

Mr. Speaker, I have an amendment to make to this piece of legislation. It's got the appropriate approval from Parliamentary Counsel. I'll take a moment to allow the pages to distribute it.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: If the hon. member proceeds on the amendment, we shall call it amendment A1.

Dr. Taft: I shall read it for the record. I move that the motion for second reading of Bill 33, Fiscal Responsibility Act, be amended by deleting all the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 33, the Fiscal Responsibility Act, be not now read a second time because the Assembly is of the view that the bill does not adequately protect current and future generations from the possibility of catastrophic natural or environmental disaster.

Now, Mr. Speaker, this motion is intended to point out and take at least a small step to addressing some of the shortcomings of this bill and to try to put it in the context of some kind of larger strategy. We are, in fact, day by day right now living through the makings of something that could be a natural disaster in the form of H1N1 flu. We don't know whether this is going to become a great pandemic or not. There are looming environmental crises with mountain pine beetle, with forest fires. There are fires burning in this province right now, and those could easily loom. We need to be responsible

and set aside in effect a contingency fund so that there's some specific amount, some specific account that we can draw on in the case of a catastrophic natural or environmental disaster.

4:10

We need to do that for the long term. That's the very least that we could do in terms of a fiscal strategy. At the very least, we could take a little bit of all that incredible wealth that has flowed through the treasury and set it aside for all generations to come to say: well, this is at least a small bit we've done for you. This is in effect an insurance policy for this generation and all future generations in Alberta against unforeseen natural or environmental disasters.

Let's consider what those could be. Tornado. We all remember – well, maybe we don't. But many of us will remember the tornado in 1987 that caused hundreds of millions of dollars' damage in the Edmonton area and cost, I think, 27 people their lives. We know that there's flooding looming this spring. This also mentions very specifically environmental disaster because none of us really are that clear on what the environmental liabilities in places like the oil sands may end up being or in many, many, many other sites in this province where there has been oil and gas development, where there have been petrochemical plants, where there's been other activity that could create the equivalent to the Sydney tar ponds or Love Canal in New York, Mr. Speaker.

I would ask all members of the Assembly to give this some thought, to consider an amendment that at least puts a little bit of specific strategy and thought to how we're managing the incredible wealth here. As the Member for Calgary-Currie pointed out, as this bill is structured right now, there's a risk of an endless downward slope. If there isn't a recovery in the price of natural gas, for example, and if this turns out to be more like 1982 than 1992 where there's the better part of a decade of an economic slowdown, then we'll be here in three or four years having drained all the coffers and set virtually nothing aside.

I should remind members here about a little bit of history. In I believe it was 1982 there was the initial downturn, and there was for the first time in many years a significant deficit for the provincial government. Then there was a brief recovery for a couple of years, and then the real pain bit. I find myself wondering increasingly, Mr. Speaker, if we aren't in that first phase of what will become perhaps a decade-long or even longer slowdown.

I think that the real long-term risk for Alberta's economy is the development of new technologies on solar power and renewables that simply take away the market for Alberta's treasure and just eliminate global demand in the long term for our carbon. If that happens, we'll have nothing left. This amendment would create at least a small pool of money that would be there like an insurance fund forever and forever and forever. I would ask all members of this Assembly to support this amendment.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, before I recognize a member to speak, this is in fact a hoist amendment?

Dr. Taft: No, it's not. It's a reasoned amendment.

The Deputy Speaker: It's a reasoned amendment. Okay.

Then I would recognize the minister of finance to debate on the amendment.

Ms Evans: Thank you very much. Speaking to the amendment, when I view the words of the amendment, the amendment suggests that, in fact, Bill 33 not be read because it fails to "adequately

protect current and future generations from the possibility of catastrophic natural or environmental disaster.” Well, there are several things we do to protect current and future generations.

The Minister of Municipal Affairs could argue that his planning for emergencies and disasters is part of the ways that this government by policy and practice and strategy prepare and safeguard future generations. The attitude that has been presented, however, is that perhaps we haven’t adequately put some money aside to prepare for these disasters. Well, Mr. Speaker, I would suggest there’s nowhere else in Canada where there is so much money in an emergency savings account to prepare for or to safeguard against any type of disaster. Nowhere else in North America do they have a \$17 billion sustainability fund of which over the next three years the draw is less than \$9 billion.

When we have identified a plan that shows the reduction in expenditure both from a value review of operations and a planned reduction of another \$2 billion worth of expenditure, in my view Bill 33, this particular act, responsibly addresses not only how we cannot borrow for operating purposes and talks about many of the principles that were in the previous act, but it does more. It disentangles what had actually been happening between accounts management in government, that really engaged us in some very intricate, complex transactions. The act, in my view, is much more transparent than we’ve had in the past. It, in fact, identifies exactly how we’re spending money on three separate tracks: obviously on the operating budget, on the capital budget, and on those things we’re doing that are safeguarding our environment and our sustainability circumstances with Green TRIP and carbon capture and storage.

I urge defeat of this so that we can proceed with this Fiscal Responsibility Act as currently written because I believe that nowhere else in Canada, as I’ve said, are we as well prepared if we need financial resources to support ourselves against any kind of disaster.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. Speaking to the amendment, which I’m assuming is A1 unless I’m told otherwise, what the Member for Edmonton-Riverview is saying is that we need to have a definite fund set aside. The hon. minister of finance indicated that somehow we could avert this disaster or we could soften the effects of it, mitigate the effects by proper planning and relying on our existing savings fund. My answer would be that if we’d had proper planning, we’d have real savings, and we wouldn’t be drawing on a \$4.7 billion deficit. If we’re going on past practice, the planning isn’t there, and I don’t see anything to indicate by legislation that we’ve seen to date this year that there’s a change in attitude.

What we have here is basically the grasshopper saying: “Well, you know, I’m going to dance all day while the sun shines, and I’m not going to worry about the winter. It’ll be taken care of.” Of course, whether we’re talking about the allegory, the lesson learned from that story, or we’re talking about Alberta’s reality, \$17 billion, whatever we want to call that amount, is a tangible, finite resource. If we’re putting all our eggs into one basket and saying that this amount of money is going to tide us over and basically praying that the global recession is going to reverse and that the value of our oil and gas will instantly rise so that we can waste another boom circumstance and head into another bust, then, you know, what do they say with regard to insanity? It’s repeatedly carrying out the same action and expecting a different outcome.

4:20

We are fortunate that the government didn’t squander even more of what was left. We are fortunate that the government recognized

the need for a sustainability fund. This was a Liberal idea. It was a stability fund that we proposed. We proposed putting a significantly larger amount of money into this to ward off concerns. Going back prior to March 3, 2008, we were saying that as much as all the surplus money that we were getting from oil and gas should be set aside. For example, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, who has a doctorate in financial management, recognized the fact that we could not continue to spend 23 per cent above what every other province spent, that we could not continue to rely on our one-trick pony of nonrenewable gas and oil, that we had to prepare for that future.

Now, Alaska is prepared for its future. Norway is the example of an absolutely fantastic preparation, where they no longer rely on their oil and gas. They can live off the proceeds that were gained on that oil and gas revenue. It will be depleted, but their savings fund won’t be. Compare what is in the area of \$400 billion even after the financial losses to what we have left in our now combined stability fund and our rapidly depleted heritage trust fund, and you can see that we’re not prepared. We’re not prepared for everyday occurrences, never mind the emergencies that this amendment A1 is addressing.

If we do not get our financial house in order, we will not be prepared to deal with global warming. The Bow Glacier is rapidly reducing, so it’s not just a matter of dealing with the after-effects of floods or the prevention of floods. It’s dealing potentially with water shortages into the future, and we’re still waiting for that land-use framework to come into place to look after water management. Now, I believe it was three years ago when once-in-a-lifetime flooding occurred on the Highwood River twice in a two-week period, yet the government still allows builders to build below the flood plain and then after the fact bails them out with insurance, well, with taxpayers’ funding. What we’re asking for is to set aside a fund which is dedicated to emergencies.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview relayed concerns such as pine beetles and the devastating economic effect it could have and the need, therefore, to manage and mitigate, but also if our best-intended efforts for whatever reason are overcome by the infestation of beetles, then we’ve got to have something to fall back on.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview talked about reclamation. He referred to the tailings ponds in Fort McMurray and to the thousands, to which I’ll add, of orphaned wells which need to be reclaimed and are being sort of addressed at 10 cents on the dollar in terms of funding set aside by industry to cover that.

Take us into the future. The government seems in its communications to be heading towards the possibility of nuclear power. Well, look around the world at some of the circumstances that have happened in minor meltdowns in Ontario, then go to the States and Three Mile Island, and then go to Europe and talk about Chernobyl. If you are going to take people down that route and you’re not going to have an emergency fund to deal with the potentials – to deal with the radioactive material that has to be dealt with, to counteract the amount of water that would be used in the cooling requirements of that facility – if you don’t have a contingency fund or an insurance policy, you’re going blindly into the future without armour, without any kind of support.

This amendment says: get your fiscal house in order; set aside an insurance plan so that we can go forward with some sense of control. Right now spending by this government is out of control. They have no idea what to save, where to cut. The cuts that we’ve seen so far are to chiropractic services, to aboriginal suicide prevention services. We see a tripling of seniors’ single Blue Cross coverage. The hits are happening at the wrong spots, yet this government will be putting out \$40 million worth of bonuses in June. It will be, as part

of their budget, putting forward \$35 million to horse racing. Why could some of that money not be the start of an insurance fund? That's what we're asking. We're asking for you to protect Albertans not only now but as a legacy in the future. Don't leave my grandchildren to clean up the mess that you are dealing with today by not having an insurance fund.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: On the amendment, the hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Oberle: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When last I checked, we were debating the Alberta government's response to the current economic crisis, and somehow during the course of this amendment we're now talking about tornados and forest fires, environmental or natural disasters. I find that a very curious twist.

More than that, Mr. Speaker, I've got to say that I am absolutely astounded by the hypocrisy of that party to stand in this House day after day after day and call for more spending and more spending and more spending. Even today the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview is complaining about our spending levels on health care. Then he stands up and launches this missile. I am absolutely astounded by the approach.

No government in North America is better prepared for the situation that we find ourselves in than the government of Alberta. If you look across this country now, where some of our fellow provinces are facing debts of \$11,000 or more for every man, woman, and child in their constituency, today we have a surplus of that amount in Alberta, the only jurisdiction in North America, Mr. Speaker.

The Member for Calgary-Varsity doesn't seem to understand that paying off debt is in fact protecting his children and their future. They don't seem to understand that the heritage savings fund is, in fact, savings, that the sustainability account is savings, that the capital account is savings, and that other reserves – Mr. Speaker, the debate is juvenile.

For the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview to stand there and forecast his brilliant economic forecast that the recoveries in the future will be weaker and shorter, well, thank you for that. Mr. Speaker, his hindsight is always one hundred per cent. He has an uncanny ability to predict the past, but he didn't see this one coming. Where was he to save Albertans when this economic crisis descended upon us? We should be debating how a government responsibly reacts to the worst economic crisis since the 1930s, and this is what we get? Thanks very much.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

4:30

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

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I, too, stand in frustration in listening to the diatribe coming from the opposition benches today. I do not support this amendment. The member for Edmonton-Riverview has suggested that we need to protect current and future generations from the possibility of catastrophic natural or environmental disaster. I know that he and the member for Calgary-Currie have made quite a push in trying to increase our savings here in this province, yet they're not quite sure what we're saving for.

They talk about this 4 and a half billion dollar operating deficit. Quite frankly, if they looked at the government budget, this government is bringing in just as much revenue as it is spending on the operating side, and the deficit side of it is particularly on the amount of money that we're spending on infrastructure. That is a direct

response in particular – and we're seeing this right across not just this country but the world – to the economic situation that we're in. We know that for every million dollars we invest in infrastructure, it directly supports approximately 140 jobs.

This particular member wants to talk about savings for a natural or environmental disaster that might happen sometime in the future, but I would suggest, Mr. Speaker, that right now we have an economic situation that Albertans want us to deal with today. We have people that have lost their jobs, people that will potentially lose their jobs in the near future. It's this type of investment particularly in infrastructure that will result in us creating some of those jobs back and getting us through this current economic situation. To suggest that the only reason we save money is for catastrophic natural and environmental disasters is, I believe, irresponsible and actually quite narrow minded. I don't think Albertans support that, and that was very obvious about a year ago.

The other part that I did want to mention is that in debate on this bill and in particular on this amendment the Member for Edmonton-Riverview has really shown his narrow grasp of the current situation that we're in. He kept referring to the current situation as a drop in oil and gas prices. Mr. Speaker, that is not the current situation. Yes, we've seen a drop in oil and gas prices, but I don't believe that that is responsible for the current global economic situation. In fact, the current situation is much more complex than that, and we're not immune from that. That's why I will not be supporting this amendment.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: On the amendment the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Enough has been said against the amendment, but I'm standing here to support this amendment. We are talking about savings here. We are concerned about a major disaster maybe happening in the province.

I will take it back to 1981-82. I know the interest rates, you know, went sky high, through the roof, and we had the money to support Albertans with their mortgage payments. There were subsidies that were there for Albertans to save their homes. I've been through that time, Mr. Speaker, and we are talking about saving for a rainy day. We are not talking about spending all the money, whatever we have here. Had the government been prudent and frugal with the money, I think we could have handled this situation better than we are doing today.

I know that every time we stand up here and we talk about savings, we are blamed to be the spenders, spenders, spenders. For the last five years, year over year, spending has gone up 10 per cent. We didn't tie it to inflation and population growth, and \$60 billion was gone just like that. I think the government has squandered an opportunity to save more for a rainy day.

In 1976, when the heritage trust fund was set up, you know, the government of the day had the vision to look into the future. Alaska and Norway set up their trust funds after we did, and look where they are today because they had this plan. They were saving for the rainy day, and they won't have to depend on nonrenewable resource income in the future. I think we are way, far, far behind those jurisdictions.

Alberta was the envy of everybody. The way we're going at it, I don't think we'll be the envy of the other provinces or other jurisdictions anymore. Within maybe a year or two we will be down where I cannot imagine being. This is not fearmongering, Mr. Speaker. We have been down that road before, and I thought we learned our lesson, but it seems like history is repeating itself again.

I think everybody should be supporting this amendment. We should start, you know, saving for the future, for the rainy day, for the disaster, whatever may come our way. For those reasons I will be supporting this amendment, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Do any other hon. members wish to speak on the amendment?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question.

[Motion on amendment to second reading of Bill 33 lost]

The Deputy Speaker: On the bill now, the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With this Fiscal Responsibility Act I think we are turning the clock back here. The Fiscal Responsibility Act was first presented in 1999 by the government of the day as a mechanism to reduce the provincial debt. The idea of the sustainability fund was originally put forward by the Leader of the Opposition as Bill 208, the Fiscal Stability Fund Calculation Act, in the fall of 2002, and that was hoisted by the government of the day. The object of the bill was to encourage the government to create a fiscal stability fund by calculating the positive effect that a fiscal stability fund would have on Alberta's financial affairs. The purpose of calculating the effect of the stability fund on the financial affairs of Alberta was to determine how the stability fund would assist in stabilizing the cyclical nature of Alberta's economy, which we are facing today again.

The stability fund would protect the sustainability of social programs and would improve the long-term fiscal planning framework of the government. That was the intent of the sustainability fund. The creation of the sustainability fund at the time would ensure that funding for health care, education, and children's services is not based on oil and gas revenues, an important first step in ensuring that funding for the priority programs and services is not based on oil and gas revenues but to have the savings in place so we can get the money coming from the savings to spend on those programs.

4:40

In 2003 the government introduced Bill 2, Financial Statutes Amendment Act, which included amendments to the Fiscal Responsibility Act. These amendments included the creation of the sustainability fund and the capital account. This bill also introduced a cap of \$3.5 billion for how much nonrenewable resource revenue could be spent before having to be transferred into the sustainability fund. The bill also introduced a clause stating that \$2.5 billion had to remain in the sustainability fund for emergencies and natural disasters, but with this new Fiscal Responsibility Act, Bill 33, I think we are just abolishing that section.

In 2004 the government amended the Fiscal Responsibility Act to increase the cap on spending nonrenewable resource revenue to \$4 billion. In 2005 they changed it again to \$4.75 billion. In 2006 the government amended the Fiscal Responsibility Act to increase the cap on spending nonrenewable resource revenue to \$5.3 billion.

These annual increases in the limit on how much nonrenewable resource revenue could be spent highlight the lack of fiscal discipline this government has shown. Every year as spending requirements went up, so did the amount of money that could be spent. There was absolutely no attempt to keep spending of the nonrenewable resource revenues in check. In 2008 the act was amended again to allow for P3 borrowing for schools and postsecondary institutions and health care facilities. Mr. Speaker, every time there were

changes made to the Fiscal Responsibility Act, the spending went up and up and up.

Now we are at a juncture again where we are going to change another bill, Bill 33, the Fiscal Responsibility Act. Under the original Fiscal Responsibility Act deficits were not permitted. The main goal behind the change to the Fiscal Responsibility Act is to allow the government to run a deficit of our capital spending and, I hear, operating spending, too, here and there, so I'm not really clear on this, you know. Maybe we will change this act again to go for operating spending again.

This change is required because there is a drop in oil and gas prices, and the recession has greatly impacted Alberta's revenue stream and its ability to maintain its \$23 billion three-year capital spending plan. The deficit will only be permitted if offset by transfers from the expanded sustainability fund, and borrowing for operating purposes continues to be disallowed while borrowing for capital purposes and by self-supporting corporations continues to be allowed. In-year operating expense increases are limited to 1 per cent of the budget total of ministry operating expenses. The way I see it, with this Fiscal Responsibility Act I think we will have no money left in the sustainability fund.

We tried to deal with that with the amendment before brought forward by the Member for Edmonton-Riverview. I would like to move another amendment here on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

I'll take my seat.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I heard you say "on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Riverview." The member already spoke, so the process would not allow it.

Mr. Kang: This is another amendment, A2. That's another amendment.

The Deputy Speaker: Is it your amendment or on behalf of?

Mr. Kang: Okay. On behalf of myself I'll move another amendment.

The Deputy Speaker: Well, I have to see the amendment. This is the amendment signed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, so procedure-wise this is not permissible because your hon. member already introduced an amendment.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Yes. Seeking clarification. This is a totally different amendment, and it's being moved on behalf of the hon. member by a different member. It's not a repeat of the first amendment. Is it being suggested that a person can sign their name to only one amendment within the process? That's the clarification I'm looking for.

The Deputy Speaker: According to our parliamentary rules, in second reading the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview already spoke once and introduced an amendment, so that is done for the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview. Anything you do on second reading – this is the second time, and it's not permissible. This amendment should have been signed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall to be valid.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Thank you for that clarification. Speaking to Bill 33 in general, obviously we will get our amendments in order and bring them forward again in discussion of Bill 33.

The point that we've tried to raise throughout our discussion on Bill 33 is the need to have a buffer, to have a backstop, to have a way of protecting ourselves when times are tough such as we're currently experiencing. But when those tough external economic times are compounded by emergent circumstances within our own province such as water shortages – the term that is frequently used is acts of God. Frequently, the acts result from the failure of man to prevent the potential of natural disasters occurring.

The Fiscal Responsibility Act, as other members before have indicated – the Member for Calgary-Currie and most recently the Member for Calgary-McCall – seems to be the equivalent of a government windshield washing blade during a rainstorm. Out of convenience it flips to the right and adds more money. Then it flips to the left and takes it away. There's no planning. It's all ad hoc, on the spot as opposed to long-term.

Now, we've talked about: why have a stability fund? Why have a sustainability fund? The government recognized that we had to have that padding, that circumstance that would tide us over. But what the government has and is basically gambling on is the idea that the global recession will magically end by the actions of other governments, that once the current stores of gas and oil run down, the price will return. It's all operating on kind of a wing and a prayer circumstance as opposed to sound economic policy.

4:50

The whole notion that, you know, six months ago it was illegal – throw in immoral, unreasonable – to consider going into debt, and then as sort of a parachute move you pull the rip cord and say, "I'm going down fast; I've got to do something," and that something turns into a \$4.7 billion deficit and further borrowing against the stability and sustainability fund through P3 projects that continue to build up our debt for another 32 years in the case of schools and in the case of pre-established ring roads 30 years, should lead Albertans to wonder how their money is not only being managed now but into the future. This government has committed Albertans 30 years into the future into continuing to pay for a debt that they continue to build up at this time. If we don't get past our reliance on nonrenewable resources, if we don't invest in education, where we know a \$1 investment produces a \$3 return, then we're basically dooming not only our present but our future, too.

On this Fiscal Responsibility Act we've had members talking about what wonderful hindsight the Liberals have. Well, I remember a former minister of aboriginal affairs making the comment: trust the Liberals to think about the future. Unfortunately, that's where this government is at. It will make announcements that sound like large expenditures at one time when that money is spread over a three-year period, but when it comes to declaring the debt, we might hear about it on June 30 just before heading into a long weekend.

The government fails to recognize that you've got to have long-term planning. There's nothing magical or overly intellectual about that. If you don't plan, if you don't have a backup plan, then you're going to fail. I mean, I spent 34 years of my life teaching students that if there wasn't a consequence for the direction you took and you didn't appreciate that consequence, you were never going to arrive at the destination you had intended to go.

This government, as I say, makes its moves, its legislation on the fly, and it buries the actual rules of the game in its regulatory framework. It shares within its own cabinet and has these wonderful discussions while the rest of Albertans, including the opposition, are left completely in the dark. When members of the opposition suggest something that would be proactive, potentially preventative, we're ridiculed and accused of wanting to spend more.

What Bill 33 calls for is going further and further into debt. What we've been saying all along is that even in your darkest hours, you

still have to save because there's no predicting where we're going to be next year, the following year, and the following year. The government is gambling that they're going to be able to just dip in to the tune of \$4.7 billion this year, a little bit less, potentially, next year and the following year. They basically put all their chips onto the table with one tour of the roulette wheel, and if it lands on black 3, then everything is solved. If it doesn't, then you know the old expression about going to hell in a handbasket.

We've got to get past this ad hoc, we've got to think long term, and it's going to take a collegial, collaborative team approach to do so. So I would encourage members opposite that if you don't like the direction of the amendment that we proposed in terms of having an insurance plan in case of emergencies, then come up with a replacement of your own that you think is more productive. Don't simply reject out of hand. Instead of condemning, I would like to see some creating. That is what we have attempted to do today and will continue to do: provide Albertans with alternatives, provide them with thoughtful possibilities, look after their futures, and continually look forward, keeping in mind what has historically occurred so that we don't repeat the mistakes of history.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of questions and comments.

Seeing none, back on the bill.

Seeing that no other member wishes to debate, the chair shall now call the question.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:56 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Benito	Forsyth	Oberle
Berger	Griffiths	Olson
Bhullar	Groeneveld	Ouellette
Boutilier	Hancock	Quest
Campbell	Horne	Renner
Cao	Jablonski	Sherman
DeLong	Leskiw	Snelgrove
Drysdale	Liepert	VanderBurg
Elniski	Marz	Vandermeer
Evans	McQueen	Webber
Fawcett	Morton	Xiao

Against the motion:

Chase	Mason	Taft
Kang	Pastoor	Taylor

Totals:	For – 33	Against – 6
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[Motion carried; Bill 33 read a second time]

**Bill 34
Drug Program Act**

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

Mr. Liepert: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to move second reading of Bill 34, the Drug Program Act.

This bill, Mr. Speaker, creates the overall legislative structure necessary to implement the Alberta pharmaceutical strategy. It represents an important change in how government drug programs operate and will enhance access, improve patient outcomes, optimize resources, and achieve better value from drugs within Alberta's health system. I'm confident that all Albertans will benefit from the improvements to government drug programs that this bill makes possible.

The bill formally establishes a government drug program in legislation under which the minister may establish plans to meet the needs of the people of this province. I'd like to note that many other provincial jurisdictions already have such legislation that governs the operation of their government drug programs. These plans will provide coverage for seniors, for palliative care patients, for low-income Albertans, and for those who need specialized drugs like patients with rare diseases or cancer.

5:10

A plan will continue to be available for any Albertan under the age of 65 who wishes to join regardless of their medical history or drug therapy needs. Under this legislative authority government will unify the drug programs offered by several different ministries into one consolidated program. This measure will streamline and bring greater consistency to government drug coverage.

Under the bill specific program operation and administrative activities will be outlined by regulation. By including program operations in regulation, this government will be able to efficiently respond to health system changes, incorporate innovative new technologies, and address emerging drug therapy needs.

To help explain the provisions included in the strategy and in this proposed legislation, I'd like to provide you with some background on the strategy's creation. To support the development of the Alberta pharmaceutical strategy, consultations with stakeholders were undertaken in 2008. They included the professional colleges and associations, the pharmaceutical industry, seniors groups, patient representatives, business associations, and insurance companies. A report was issued that summarized key findings. Many of these findings are reflected in both the strategy and in this legislation. For example, we heard that the program should facilitate cost sharing among individuals, employers, and government. As such, the bill enables the minister to establish premiums, copayments, deductibles, and subsidy rates for members.

We also heard about the need for a way to assist patients who do not tolerate or benefit from standard drug therapy. I'm excited that this bill includes a provision for an independent consideration process for nonstandard drug therapy. I strongly believe that this new independent consideration process will facilitate access to appropriate care and provide better service to Albertans in need.

As well, Bill 34 provides for a drug approval process that will further strengthen accountability to taxpayers by focusing government spending on drugs that are shown to have value. The Expert Committee on Drug Evaluation and Therapeutics, which provides essential advice on drug therapies to the minister, will continue, and other expert panels will be established. These committees will provide the expertise necessary to address the complex issues involved with operating a government drug program. Moreover, as outlined in the Alberta pharmaceutical strategy, a public members committee will be introduced to provide a societal and ethical perspective in the drug approval process.

To support these and other key initiatives, Bill 34 includes a number of additional provisions. The bill allows the minister to

have providers, who participate in the administration of the drug program, undertake certain activities such as providing important information to patients about the cost of their drugs or communicating information about the drug program's processes and rules.

This bill also includes inspection authority, which strengthens the government's capacity to audit and verify the accuracy and eligibility of paid benefits. These provisions enhance the government's ability to ensure accountability and financial responsibility for public funding under the drug program. In addition, the bill incorporates liability protection for the minister, his committees, and advisers so that drug listing and benefit decisions can be made in an open manner based on public interest without fear of challenges from pharmaceutical manufacturers or others with commercial interests.

Mr. Speaker, this bill demonstrates our recognition of the important role of drug therapies in our health system and signifies this government's continued commitment to invest in and make drug coverage available to all Albertans in need.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Dr. Taft: Did the minister move adjournment? No. Okay. I want to begin by noting that to our knowledge we weren't expecting this bill to be debated this afternoon, from our arrangement with the House leaders. However, we'll do the best that we can. Perhaps with the agreement of the Government House Leader I'll move adjournment.

Mr. Renner: We were to debate and adjourn, so you can adjourn debate.

Dr. Taft: Okay. Mr. Speaker, perhaps it's just a simple misunderstanding, so I'll move adjournment of this bill. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

The Chair: The chair would like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 10

Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act

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

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. This bill addresses what will be and has been an area of real concern probably for all of us, certainly for many of us as MLAs. Undoubtedly we've received comments and complaints from constituents who have had concerns about supportive living and are feeling like things aren't quite the way they ought to be, so I hope that this bill addresses some of those concerns. I know that I've had concerns as an MLA, and I'm guessing that any number of other people have.

Given that we're in committee, I'd like to spend just a few minutes on some of the specifics of this bill and go through a section-by-section analysis. I'm going to start, Mr. Chairman, with the definitions. I've been trying to think through exactly how you capture what is a supportive living accommodation and what isn't and how you make it appropriate to capture under this act what you intend to capture and don't capture other things.

The definition right here under section 1(g) of supportive living accommodation says:

“Supportive living accommodation” means buildings or units in buildings that are intended for permanent residential living where an operator also provides or arranges for services in order to assist residents to live as independently as possible.

Now, that strikes me as very, very broad, and I guess that’s the basis that the bill is going to build on. What we’re talking about here is a building or units in a building intended for permanent residential living. Well, that could be an apartment, condominium, house, boarding house. It could be all kinds of things.

It says that there has to be an operator who provides or arranges for services – so the operator doesn’t actually have to provide anything – to assist residents to live as independently as possible. Again I have to wonder: what in the world does that really mean?

Then it goes on gradually to narrow that, Mr. Chairman, in section 2. It says it has to be “provided to 4 or more adults who are not related to the operator.” So right away if you have three people in a facility, then that’s not going to be covered under this bill, and I think that needs to be considered. We’re not trying to capture really small operations; for better or for worse, I’m not sure. I mean, I don’t see why it couldn’t be the case that three unrelated people living in a permanent facility and getting these services would also be protected, so perhaps the minister at some point will be able to address that.

5:20

Then it says that the operator has to provide or arrange for services “related to safety and security for the persons.” It doesn’t say what kind of services, so that could be something as simple as an alarm service in a building or, you know, a monitoring service at the front door. Is that all we’re limited to? Do we want to capture something as broad as that?

Then it says under 2(1)(c):

The operator provides, offers or arranges for

- (i) at least one meal per day, or not “and” but “or”
- (ii) housekeeping services.

It seems to me that we need to think this through here. Meals may not be provided. It may just be housekeeping services. Does that mean that we might end up capturing, you know, a rooming house where a weekly housekeeping service is provided? There may not be any meals, but there could be a security system at the front door and weekly housekeeping or weekly laundry, and that’s it. Are we meaning to capture those sorts of facilities under here? I think we want to think all that through. Some comments from the minister on that at some point would be helpful in debate.

Then the licensing requirements are laid out. I should point out that there are some exclusions under the application here. I’m under section 2.

This Act does not apply to

- (a) a nursing home under the Nursing Homes Act
- (b) an approved hospital . . .
- (c) a facility referred to in . . . the Social Care Facilities Licensing Act, or
- (d) a class, type or category of supportive living accommodation designated as exempt in accordance with the regulations,

which is absolutely wide open and completely undefined.

So right away, Mr. Chairman, I’m going to be looking for some clarity from the government members. What are we capturing under this bill? Why have we set the minimum size? Why have we set some of the standards the way we’ve set them?

There are then the licensing provisions of the bill. Clearly, it says that a licence is required, which is reassuring. Then it goes on to

explain the application for a licence or a person who is ineligible or how a licence may be refused or cancelled and that kind of thing, so I’m going to assume that that’s pretty straightforward.

Then we begin to get to some of the issues of how this legislation might be actually acted upon in section 5, which is titled Designation of Director. It says under 5(1) that “the Minister may designate a director for the purposes of this Act,” and then in 5(2), the director under this “may delegate to any person any of the duties imposed or powers conferred on the director under this Act.” So we’re setting up a standard sort of bureaucratic arrangement here to implement the act. We end up with a director under the act and then inspectors, which are addressed under section 6.

Then the role and responsibilities of the inspector to conduct inspections are under section 7. This is where I begin to have a few other questions, Mr. Chairman. Under Inspections it says here: “At the request of the director, for the purposes of ensuring compliance with this Act, the regulations, [or] an order,” inspections may be undertaken at any reasonable hour. It says: “An inspector may, with the permission of the operator . . . at any reasonable hour enter the supportive living accommodation.” I think we need to consider fully in this Assembly the issue of “with the permission of the operator.” Perhaps this is done after the fact or later in this legislation. How would the bill allow an inspector to enter a facility if there are serious concerns and the operator doesn’t want them to do that? What if the operator wants to enter at any hour? Maybe they want to enter at 3 in the morning for a particular reason. How is this legislation going to deal with that?

Frankly, one of my concerns with inspections under this bill and with the attitude towards inspections in some of the other fields is that the government typically gives notice that an inspection will be conducted unless there has been an explicit complaint. I think we need to consider that. I understand the pros and the cons, and I don’t think we should always be in a default position of giving notice of a routine inspection. Frankly, I don’t know why we wouldn’t once in a while just do a routine inspection without notice, just have the inspector walk in and see what it’s like when nobody is prepared for an inspection, see how clean the facility is, see how people are being treated, see if the security systems are actually enacted, see if the staff who are supposed to be there are actually there, and all those other things that should be in place every day but may not be unless an inspector is scheduled to come.

I have no doubt, Mr. Chairman, that from time to time – and I regret to say this – in some places there will be operators who inevitably are going to spruce up the facility because they know that tomorrow or next week the inspector is coming. So I would like to see provisions and an attitude from this government in this legislation and elsewhere that routine inspections can and do occur unannounced. I think that would improve the system at no extra cost, it would keep the system honest, and I think we would look after the residents of these facilities better. That’s one of my concerns here under section 7. The way section 7 is set up, at least initially, it looks like notice is going to be given of that inspection.

It says also in 7(2), “An inspector may enter the supportive living accommodation of a particular resident only with the permission of that resident or that resident’s legal representative.” Why are we doing that? Well, I suppose we’re doing that to respect privacy, but it also sets up a situation where for reasons of fear or for reasons of intimidation or for other untoward reasons people may not allow or invite an inspector into their facility when, in fact, they’d be served well by having that inspector come in.

It also says under 7(3) that an inspector may interview employees and residents of the accommodation, relatives, legal representatives, or “any other person who may have information relevant to the

inspection.” Well, that’s a good provision. There should not be any particular limit on who the inspector may want to interview.

I would make the point at this moment, Mr. Chairman, that these inspectors, I hope, will be properly trained. It’s not clear in here, so far as I have yet seen, that the inspectors will be required to have a particular set of qualifications. Mr. Chairman, will the inspector be required to have any background in, let’s say, public health inspection or in health care or in police investigation or in anything else? What about interviewing skills? We clearly see here in section 7(3) that they’re allowed to interview virtually anybody who may have useful information. Well, that’s great, but I want to make sure that they also have the skills to conduct proper interviews.

5:30

If an inspector removes books, records, or other documents, they have to keep a record, and so on. That’s good. Under 7(5) when an inspector takes samples of any material, food, or equipment, the inspector shall give a receipt, and so on, and keep a record of that. That’s fine.

It goes on, then, under section 7(7):

If permission is refused or cannot be reasonably obtained under subsection (1) or if anyone prevents an inspector from exercising powers under subsection (1) or obstructs or hinders the inspector . . . a judge of the Court of Queen’s Bench may on the application of the inspector make any order.

In other words, it sounds here like if an inspection is blocked, the inspector has to go to court and get a judge to allow the inspection to occur. Well, I think there are some serious issues that need to be discussed there.

Maybe I’m misunderstanding, and maybe the minister or a government member will correct me in debate, but it seems to me here that if there’s a concern at a facility, if an inspector turns up and access is blocked – maybe the inspector even has turned up unannounced, but access is blocked – then the inspector has to go to court to get permission to conduct an inspection. Well, by the time they’ve gone to court and gone through all of that, the problems could be concealed, the place could be cleaned up, the mouldy old food that’s being served could be thrown out and replaced with new food, et cetera, et cetera.

So I am concerned here, Mr. Chairman, that the inspection process doesn’t have enough teeth. It doesn’t have enough muscle to really bite where it needs to bite. I think we need to discuss that and quite possibly consider an amendment as this bill proceeds.

Mr. Chairman, I know there are others here who wish to speak to this bill. I don’t want to monopolize all of the time. Being that we’re in committee, I know I can get up again, so I would like to give an opportunity to the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood or anywhere else to speak. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. As the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports I’m pleased to rise to debate the Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act. This legislation reflects the priorities of our government to increase the quality of life of seniors and persons with disabilities.

I feel very strongly that Bill 10 is needed legislation that reflects the growth and sophistication of the supportive living sector in Alberta. It’s legislation that recognizes the changing needs and complexities of seniors and persons with disabilities who want to live as independently as possible while having access to the accommodations and services that they need. This legislation will replace existing legislation for the licensing of supportive living accommodations in the province, and it will clearly define supportive living in legislation for the first time.

The Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act will also assist the Seniors and Community Supports ministry to achieve the mandate to improve the choice and availability of continuing care accommodations in the province. It will establish a licensing regime to assure quality accommodation and services relating to accommodation. It will enhance the safety and security of residents whether or not the facility is funded by the government. It will provide the ministry with the ability to respond quickly to change and improve the ministry’s ability to keep the standards up to date by meeting the changing needs of an evolving supportive living sector. It will establish a mechanism for addressing complaints and concerns about accommodations and services, and it will minimize licensing steps for operators with good track records and assist other operators to make changes where required so they are compliant to the legislation.

Mr. Chairman, we now do an inspection every single year. As the Member for Edmonton-Riverview mentioned, we give notice. That’s true; we give notice of the annual inspection. However, we also do random inspections when we feel it’s necessary. I want people to know that. Our inspectors are already well trained. We have done this inspection for over a year. You’ll see on our website. If you go to our website, you can look up every single facility in Alberta, and you can see whether it has been compliant or not. If it hasn’t been compliant and there’s been a complaint, you will also see that on the website if it hasn’t been resolved. I want you to know that that website is a very good tool for people to use to determine whether or not a facility is where they want to put a loved one, a friend, or themselves.

Under Bill 10 the province will also have the ability to take the required steps, including closing a facility, if an operator continues to not meet standards or when the residents’ safety is at risk.

As you can see, this is good legislation that will help seniors and persons with disabilities to live as independently as possible and to age in the right place. I urge all members to support Bill 10.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I’d like to make a few comments with respect to this bill, Bill 10, the Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act. This is a bill which will legislate supportive living instead of having it fall under the Social Care Facilities Licensing Act, and it clarifies licensing requirements and strengthens investigation procedures.

Mr. Chairman, there are some positive things here. I want to agree with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview when he says that the inspections need to be random, regular, and unannounced. I think that that’s critical. In fact, when we had the long-term care report from the Auditor General, he indicated that people who do inspections of those facilities – and I think the same applies here – needed to be properly trained professional people and that they needed to make unannounced inspections, that the committee of volunteers led by a Conservative backbench member was just not up to the job, and it was a much more serious business and needed to be dealt with. I agree with respect to that point.

Now, Mr. Chairman, it’s probably a good thing that we have more regulation of supportive living, and in that sense I don’t have any difficulty supporting this bill. But I want to just indicate my very serious concern with the broader question which I think this fits into. Now, the minister has just spoken about the importance of making sure that people get the right care, and I agree with that. But what’s happening today is that hundreds of individuals require more care than they are getting and more care than they will get here.

The long-term care bed issue is a major issue, and it affects and impacts people in a variety of ways. One of the things that I want to

see is some action on the part of government to limit or control or restrain or halt the conversion of long-term care beds into supportive living, and there's nothing in this act that really deals with that.

Here's what happens, Mr. Chairman, and it's happened in a number of places in our province, including at Hinton and several other places. You have long-term care facilities. Long-term care beds are expensive: people receive nursing care, they get their drugs for free, and there's a variety of services that are included in long-term care. You have patients in long-term care receiving these services and paying a fixed amount, and all of a sudden the operator decides for economic reasons to convert their facility or some of the beds from long-term care into assisted living or some other form. So you actually have people who are displaced who no longer get the care that they need and can no longer afford the additional services.

Part of the problem with this approach is its cost-plus basis. You pay a certain amount for beds, but if you need nursing care, you pay. If you need drugs, you pay. If you need additional services, you pay. There's a financial aspect and there's a care aspect that need to be dealt with. I think both of them deserve attention.

5:40

It's great to have additional licensing for supportive living, but we need to address the question of making sure that people who need long-term care beds can get them. Now, the minister of health has repeatedly said that the opposition wants to institutionalize people and put them in long-term care beds when they don't really need it, and I don't think that that's a fair statement, Mr. Chairman. I think the reality is that there are many people who actually need and need badly the services that they receive in long-term care beds but can't get them. They are in assisted living facilities. They are in supportive living facilities. They are in apartments. They are in their children's homes. They are in acute-care beds, in particular. Last night in the estimates I asked a question of the minister of health about that. In his own report it gives the number of people who are occupying acute-care beds that really need to be in long-term care beds. I think it's 500 or 600 people. Those people are occupying acute-care beds.

Of course, acute-care beds are much more expensive than long-term care beds, so there's a burden on the taxpayer, but it also means that there are not enough acute-care beds for throughput from emergency rooms. It's one of the key reasons, one of the fundamental reasons why we've seen a sharp rise in waiting room times in our hospitals. It's not that they can't intake the patients and treat them in the emergency rooms appropriately, but they have nowhere to put them when they've dealt with them. The acute-care beds are occupied by long-term care bed patients. So it affects a number of areas of our health care system and our seniors' support and housing network.

With respect to this bill it's fine that there is going to be greater regulation and higher fines and so on. I think that that is a very positive thing. But I do believe that if the government believes that this is the solution to the long-term care problem we have, they are sadly mistaken. I want to make sure that people who don't need long-term care beds or don't need to even be in an institution are not institutionalized. That's not the objective. The objective is to make sure that those who do need it have it available, and so far we haven't been able to do that.

The Conservative Party in the election promised about 600 new beds, but that was rescinded by the government's December 2008 continuing care strategy, which states that there won't be an increase in the number of long-term care beds over the next several years. Well, this contradicts some answers I got from the minister of health last night about construction of new long-term care beds. We're still trying to sort out exactly what the situation is.

We do know that the patients of an auxiliary hospital in Jasper, including some who were palliative, had their care changed to a designated assisted living situation. That meant, really, that they were only having housing provided when what they really need is continuing health care. In Hinton citizens are still fighting to reverse the decision of 2005 to convert their long-term care facilities into assisted living.

Mr. Chairman, I think that we need to have something – for example, a bill of rights or an ombudsman – for seniors in supportive living situations so that there are mechanisms to ensure that they're well cared for. Also, people in supportive living do not have tenancy protection. This bill contains a consequential amendment that exempts people in supportive living from the Residential Tenancies Act.

I have a few more things to say about the Alberta NDP action plan on long-term care, but I'm getting the "be quiet" signal from the Government House Leader. I don't really have to do what he says, but I did agree that I would move to adjourn debate even though I haven't quite gotten to the NDP action plan on long-term care. We may get back to that.

In the meantime, Mr. Chairman, in fulfillment of my agreement I will move that we adjourn debate on Bill 10.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 11

Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2009

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you, and I'll swim upstream very fast. Bill 11, Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2009, proposes more punitive penalties for fishery violations. The purpose is to equip the courts to include penalties that bind offenders to return fisheries back to a healthy state. The reason for this bill is tremendously sound because there are severe pressures in Alberta that affect fish populations. Alberta has only about 1,500 fish-bearing streams and 1,100 lakes, so careful management is needed to balance use by approximately 1,500 domestic, 200 commercial, and 300,000 anglers competing for these fish. That information comes from the Sustainable Resource Development fish conservation strategy for Alberta 2006 to 2010.

This is a great piece of legislation, and I suggest we call the vote on the legislation, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Seeing no other members who wish to debate on this bill, the chair shall now call the question.

[The clauses of Bill 11 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I move that the committee now rise and report Bill 11 and progress on Bill 10.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 11. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 10.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.
The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank all members for their co-operation in getting us through business this afternoon, and I move that we call it 6 o'clock and adjourn until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:50 p.m. to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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