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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.

Monday, October 26, 2009

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Welcome back.

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 of our country. Amen.

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

Hon. Members:

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

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Presentation to the Assembly of Mr. Paul Hinman Member for Calgary-Glenmore

The Speaker: Hon. members, I've received from the Acting Chief Electoral Officer of Alberta the report of the returning officer for the constituency of Calgary-Glenmore containing the results of the by-election conducted on September 14, 2009, which states that a by-election was conducted in the constituency of Calgary-Glenmore and that Mr. Paul Hinman was duly elected as the Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

[Preceded by the Sergeant-at Arms, Mr. Hinman approached the Mace]

The Speaker: Hon. members, I have the honour to present to you Paul Hinman, the new Member for Calgary-Glenmore, who has taken the oath as a member of this House, has inscribed the roll, and now claims the right to take his seat. Hon. member, please take your seat.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislature a very, very special guest, His Excellency David Jacobson, the newly appointed United States ambassador to Canada. The United States is our closest neighbour. It's also our province's largest and most important trading partner.

In addition to serving in the White House, assisting the President, and the ambassador's successful career as a lawyer, he has worked to advance nanotechnology and the economic competitiveness of cities, two areas in which Alberta is very interested. Members may

recall that Mr. Jacobson visited Alberta just a couple of weeks ago. We are certainly very appreciative of the fact that he took the time so early in his tenure to learn first-hand about Alberta, especially about our energy sector. Today I look forward to speaking with the ambassador about the close relationship that exists between our province and his country, and I am confident that under Mr. Jacobson that relationship will continue to grow and to be strengthened.

I would like to congratulate our new ambassador on his position. I'm looking forward to, again, building the relationship on behalf of all Albertans. I wish him every success in this new position and let him know that he is always welcome in our great province of Alberta. I will ask him to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome.

Introduction of Guests

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

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real pleasure to stand and introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly the new leader of the Wildrose Alliance, Danielle Smith. She's just gone through a vigorous leadership campaign and was very victorious in that, and it's a pleasure to introduce her to the floor. I ask that she stand and receive the warm welcome of the Legislature.

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

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly 30 students from l'École St. Angela in the fine constituency of Edmonton-Calder and their teacher, Miss Sophia DeRose. All of the students are here this week attending the School at the Legislature. I would ask them to all now rise and receive the traditional warm greeting of the Assembly.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure this afternoon to introduce to you and through to members of the Assembly 25 students from Sweet Grass school. They are accompanied today by their teacher, Mrs. Nicki Gardner. They've been here learning about the legislative process and have asked some very tough questions. I'd like to invite them now to stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Employment and Immigration.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the Members of the Legislative Assembly 27 Alberta government employees from Employment and Immigration. They represent a variety of areas in the ministry. Some of these individuals work directly with Albertans to improve their work-related skills; promote and enforce fair, safe, and healthy work environments; and provide support to those in need. They also help newcomers settle into their communities. Others work in corporate roles like IT, data development, finance, administration, intergovernmental relations, and information and privacy. Each staff member plays an important part in helping Albertans reach their potential in the workplace. I believe they are in both galleries. I would like them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a special guest, John Hampson, who is sitting in the members' gallery. John has served for the past year on the Children and Youth Services Youth Advisory Panel, and John and his fellow panelists this past year tackled a number of important issues, including our gang strategy, homelessness, and provided ongoing input into the Alberta mentorship partnership. John is attending the University of Calgary and has recently become a constituent of Banff-Cochrane. I would ask that he rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations. [applause]

Mr. Webber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't know what that was for.

An Hon. Member: First time up.

Mr. Webber: First time up, yes.

Actually, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly our new U.S. consul general, Ms Laura Lochman. Ms Laura Lochman has replaced Mr. Tom Huffaker, who was our past U.S. consul out of Calgary. Tom was and continues to be a good friend of mine. He is now with CAPP in Calgary. Laura has replaced him. I've met her on a few occasions, and she has just been an absolute pleasure. Today I understand that she apparently represents the largest geographic area of any consul general in the United States. Laura, welcome to Alberta. Welcome to Calgary. We look forward to working well with you through your office and with the ambassador. Thank you for coming today.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two wonderful young Albertans: first, Riley Georgsen from my constituency, who is here with his new bride, Samantha. Riley is now living in Calgary with Samantha. Of course, Calgary is better for that. Riley has been an amazing young person in volunteer work in the constituency. He also is probably single-handedly responsible for bringing me into the new century technologically and getting me in touch with young people in Alberta through the new mediums. I would ask for them to please rise now and receive the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a guest who is in the public gallery, Mr. Raghbir Singh Badesha. Mr. Badesha is a teacher by trade and is very interested in the Canadian political system, so he is here today to watch question period. Question period is a great opportunity for him to witness our democracy in action. I would like to ask Mr. Badesha to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise. With us today is Alberta Firefighters Association president, Mr. Craig Macdonald. A few days ago a half-dozen or so of our members geared up in firefighters' outfits and entered a live fire just to see the risks and dangers involved in the firefighting profession. To say the least, the atmosphere in that chamber was hotter than we sometimes face over here in this Chamber. Firefighters will be approaching members of this Legislature as time goes on, asking for the addition of two additional cancers onto a list of presumptive cancer legislation with the Workers' Compensation Board. I would ask Mr. Craig Macdonald to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Also, I have a very young and, indeed, inspiring constituent. Mr. David Adomako-Ansah has struggled with several health problems. After contracting lupus, he had a stroke. Then he was on a Berlin heart awaiting a heart transplant. Also, a pacemaker was implemented. Recently, in February, he had a heart transplant. While going through all that, Mr. Speaker, imagine: he has started a not-for-profit agency and started raising money for the Stollery children's hospital through basketball. He has created a foundation called the Dunk on Disease Foundation. Now he's fully recovered. He's attending NAIT. He will be a broadcaster when he graduates. He tells me that he will not stop raising money for Stollery for as long as he possibly can. I would like to ask him to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly. He's truly an inspirational man.

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

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly, seated in the members' gallery, two constituents from Edmonton-Meadowlark. The first constituent is Brent McGillis. He's a hard-working Albertan and an ironworker.

My second constituent is Sharon Crawford. Sharon is an advocate for the transgendered community and no stranger to the Legislature as her father is the hon. Neil Stanley Crawford.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, seated in the public gallery, the future doctors are in the House. We have 50 medical students from the universities of Alberta and Calgary, who are here for the Pan-Alberta Political Action Day. They are meeting with MLAs regarding the rural integrated clinical clerkship, which places medical students in rural communities for 36 weeks of training.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask all of my guests to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly three individuals who attend upon the House today to remind particularly the Minister of Health and Wellness that there are a number of issues around gender reassignment surgery that remain unresolved. I'd ask them to please rise. They are Mercedes Allen, Jan Buterman, and Amy Swanson. If you would please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly additional members of the Trans Equality Society of Alberta and transgendered

community supporters. My guests are concerned about the lack of consultation given to the decision to cut funding for gender reassignment surgery. They believe that all potential cuts to health care should be given careful thought about how they affect Albertans, and they feel it's reasonable to ask the same regarding gender reassignment surgery. I would now ask my guests, who are seated in the members' gallery, to please rise as I call their names: April Friesen, Sabrina Dow, Gina Bennett, Eva Ryckman, Terry Ferguson, and Michelle Drinkell. If you could join me in providing them with the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and introduce a very special guest this afternoon and a very good friend of mine. It is a great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly Mr. Bill Smith. Mr. Smith is a former firefighter. Many members of this House will know that he is also a well-respected lawyer in the Calgary community. He is the incoming president of the Progressive Conservative Party of Alberta, and we are very excited about that. I'd ask all members in this Assembly today to join me in extending a warm welcome to Mr. Smith.

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

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly three people representing Meyers Norris Penny. These people are here today to witness the introduction of Bill 53 later this afternoon. I would ask Mr. Cal Carpenter, Mr. Tim Dawson, and Mr. Lanny Westersund to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislature a couple of my bosses, constituents from Calgary-North Hill, Jessica Powless and Greg Conlin. It would be fair to say that I would not be sitting here today if it weren't for the hard work and dedication of Jessica. She was a tireless worker on my campaign, and I owe her a great deal of gratitude. Her boyfriend, Greg Conlin, is a power engineer at Enmax and is not only a born and raised Calgarian and Albertan but a born and raised Calgary-North Hillian. I'd like them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Legislature.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to the rest of the Assembly two individuals among dozens who showed up at the Legislature today to show their concern about the progressive erosion in the health care system. They are Carol Kujala and Gerry Chiasson. Please rise, and we'll extend to you the welcome of the Assembly.

The Clerk: Oral Question Period.

The Speaker: Hon. members, before we proceed, there have been some changes.

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I wonder if it would be appropriate to ask for unanimous consent of the House for today only, because it's

our first day back, to allow continued introductions and then the ministerial statement and responses that were anticipated.

1:50

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 7(1.1) says, "At 1:50 p.m., the Assembly shall proceed to Oral Question Period with the balance of the daily routine to follow." There's a request being made here by the Government House Leader to waive this section of our standing orders and to proceed with the Routine, which would include the conclusion of introductions and dealing with the subject matter of a ministerial statement and the appropriate response. Unanimous consent would need to be granted.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Mr. Boutilier: Well, thank the hon. Government House Leader for that one.

From my constituency of Fort McMurray, the oil sands capital of the world, it's my pleasure to introduce a gentleman who has called Fort McMurray his home for over 30 years. In fact, he ran a restaurant, a 24-hour café, for the last 25 years, and now he runs my constituency office. I'd ask the honourable representative from Fort McMurray, Vaughn Jessome, to rise. Also, with him today is Rolando Nicolas. They are both in the gallery. I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, it's a pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to the Assembly two other excellent Wildrose Alliance members. They are tireless soldiers that have helped me in the by-election. I'd like to introduce to the Assembly Said Abdalbaki and his cousin Mustapha Abdalbaki.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I believe that that concludes my list of those who indicated to me their desire to do an introduction today. Did I miss anyone?

Well, then, let me draw to your attention the presence today in the House of the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright, who today is celebrating an anniversary of birth. Happy birthday.

Ministerial Statements

H1N1 Influenza Vaccination Program

Mr. Liepert: First of all, Mr. Speaker, I thank all members for changing the House rules for today. I think it is an important day because today marks the launch of Alberta's H1N1 pandemic flu vaccine program across the province. I'd like to take this opportunity to join our chief medical officer of health in urging all Albertans, including every member of this Assembly, to join in the effort to control this new virus by taking advantage of the incredible efforts of the medical community to make a safe vaccine available in such a short time.

As I stated in a previous statement to the Legislature, the province is prepared. We received approval from Health Canada last week for the new vaccine. It's been shipped across the province, staff have been trained, clinics are now up and running, and we've communicated to the public the importance of protecting themselves, their families, and friends. There's just one more thing that has to happen: Albertans have to roll up their sleeves and help us get the job done.

Mr. Speaker, sometimes we take medical advances for granted. Here we are, in a situation where a new virus appeared in April,

challenging public health officials around the world, and within six months we have a safe and effective vaccine ready for delivery. It's actually quite amazing compared to pandemic situations in the past. Yet we still see polls saying that people are reluctant to get their shots. They say that there's too much confusion. Some say that the vaccine isn't safe, et cetera. Well, I'm here to give the people of Alberta a simple message: we have a safe, effective vaccine, don't listen to the naysayers, and get immunized.

Mass clinics started delivering the vaccine across Alberta today, focusing on the high-risk groups first. I'd ask everyone to please check www.albertahealthservices.ca for the nearest clinic. That means that people under 65 with chronic health conditions and their caregivers, kids between six months and five years of age, pregnant women, health care workers, and people in remote or isolated settings and communities, all these groups, should get immunized as soon as possible. No one will be turned away at the clinics, but we are aiming to have those groups who can benefit the most come forward first.

The vaccine will be offered initially through mass immunization clinics as this is the most efficient means of immunizing a large number of people in as short a time as possible. Alberta Health Services will also look at the possibility of resuming immunization programs for the seasonal flu in seniors' lodges once a critical mass of the general population has been immunized for H1N1.

In the next several weeks, once the vaccine stockpile in Alberta increases, we'll distribute that supply to other vaccine providers, including family physicians, pharmacists, and private vendors who contract with large employers to set up immunization clinics in the workplace.

As our chief medical officer confirmed last week, we are now in the second wave, as predicted, and people need to keep practising those other common-sense behaviours as well. They include coughing into your sleeve, staying home if you're sick, washing your hands, and calling Health Link for further advice if you're not getting better.

Now, I'm not a medical expert, but those who are all say the same thing: the vaccine is the best way to control this pandemic. I urge all Albertans to go out and get immunized.

As we move further into the flu season, Alberta's chief medical officer of health in conjunction with other health experts will continue to provide timely, accurate, and important information in our fight against H1N1.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Dr. Taft: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Health and Wellness is correct when he says that Albertans should ignore people spreading disinformation about the safety of vaccines. The safe, responsible thing to do is to get immunized as soon as possible for the H1N1 influenza.

This morning about 9:20 I drove past the immunization clinic at Westmount mall in Edmonton. I was hoping to get immunized myself. I was startled to see a lineup that went out the door and stretched way around the outside of the building. Hundreds of people were trying to do just what the minister has asked, get immunized. But the organization is clearly not in place for this to succeed.

We are already in our office getting phone calls from across the province that the immunization clinics are swamped. We're being told that there are few, if any, provisions for disabled people, that seniors, pregnant women, children, and others are being expected to stand for hours. People are asking why, for all of Calgary, in a serious pandemic that has been foreseen for half a year, there are

only four immunization clinics and only five in Edmonton. Nine clinics to urgently immunize 2 million people won't do the job.

If this is the best this government can do, it is not good enough. The shortfalls of the immunization campaign are almost certain to lead to a surge in emergency wards and intensive care units. People will become critically ill and some will die because they do not have immunizations, and some of those people, perhaps many of them, will not have immunizations because, despite months of preparation time, this government could only open nine clinics for 2 million people.

We have a chance here if this government acts immediately to correct this problem. I urge this administration to act this afternoon and order urgent action to expand the immunization program. Even if the current clinics run 24/7, the flu season may be over before a large proportion of the population is immunized.

Mr. Speaker, my plan originally for this statement was to join the minister this afternoon in a simple plea to Albertans to get immunized. Clearly, it's not Albertans who need to hear a plea. They are trying to do their duty. It is this government that needs to pay attention. While I urge all Albertans to join the long lineups at these immunization clinics, my real plea is to this government: act now, this afternoon, to put in place an immunization program that really works.

Thank you.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: Just hold the clock, please.

Statement by the Speaker

Rotation of Questions

The Speaker: Hon. members, before we begin, just a brief statement for clarity with respect to the order of question period with a changed situation in the Legislative Assembly. The routine today and tomorrow – that is, day 1 and day 2 of this session – will be exactly the same as it was when we left here in June earlier this year. On Wednesday the fifth question will go to the Member for Calgary-Glenmore and replace the ordinary government question, and on Thursday the fifth question, which is ordinarily a government question, will go to the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo. During tablings this afternoon I'll table a schematic to deal with this particular matter. So we're on the same routine today and tomorrow, slight adjustments on Wednesday and Thursday.

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

2:00

Alberta Hospital Edmonton

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This summer the Premier changed the plans for Alberta Hospital Edmonton three times in two months. Only after rallies and public outcries did he realize the mistake and recently created an implementation team to help clean up the mess. To the Premier: why did the Premier wait months after the initial announcement to sort out any consultation and involve those most affected?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I support the Alberta Health Services Board in their plan to move people into the community. It definitely improves their quality of life. I also listened to the position taken by the board when they said that it may take two to three years. I certainly thought that was an appropriate length of time to move the number of people and to ensure that the supports are in place in the community. This implementation committee will ensure that that is going to be done. I look forward to the work that's going to be done by the committee over the next number of months to place many

people into communities across Alberta to ensure that they have a much better quality of life.

Dr. Swann: Well, again to the Premier: will the Premier guarantee that the team's recommendations will be made public before any closures?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, first of all, there are no closures. People are moving from an institution to community-based beds, and we want to make sure that that transfer is done in the best interests of the patients, those that are presently residing in the Alberta Hospital. Our number one priority is to make sure that people are looked after, supports are in place, and their quality of life is improved.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, how can the Premier say that no beds are going to be closed when it's been clear in the public that up to 80 beds will be closed when these people leave Alberta Hospital Edmonton? What does this mean?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, you know, we're moving people out of an institution. So many community groups have supported the Alberta government in its position to give people a better quality of life, moving them out of an institution and moving them to a community bed. They move from one facility, and they'll move into accommodations that appropriately reflect their needs. We'll make sure that the services are provided and give them a quality of life. Why in the world would these people want to keep people living in institutions for the rest of their lives? What kind of quality of life is that?

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

H1N1 Influenza Pandemic Planning

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pandemic influenza is here. The vaccine will save lives, and I applaud the tireless efforts of health officials and front-line workers delivering this important preventative measure. I myself will be getting the vaccine when I have hours to spare. Unfortunately, there are only nine flu clinics available between Edmonton and Calgary to cover over 2 million people. My questions are to the Premier. With years of planning for pandemics already completed, how is it that there are only nine clinics providing immunization to over 2 million people in Alberta today?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, as the minister communicated earlier, there are specific populations that we're asking to receive their H1N1 flu vaccine. Over the course of time the vaccine will be available for all Albertans, but we're asking those that are more susceptible to the flu to receive their vaccine today. We'll ensure that all other Albertans, including those that may not be at risk as much as others, receive their vaccine in the province.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, that was a real dodge.

Will the Premier actually admit that his leadership is responsible for the lack of staff and the lack of funding for these essential clinics in Alberta?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we said many months ago that even though the budget is under pressure, this is a priority, that we want to ensure that all Albertans have an opportunity to receive the

vaccine. There are some that still are undecided whether they should or not. We certainly encourage everyone to receive the vaccine. We will do everything in our power to make sure that everybody receives the vaccination.

Dr. Swann: Will the Premier, then, commit to opening new clinics within days to address the backlog of individuals who need this vaccination?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, let's be clear. We've had a number of discussions in this House in the past about whether or not government listens to our chief medical officer of health and our public health officials. This plan that was rolled out was clearly the plan of the chief medical officer of health and public officials around the province. For us as political members of this Assembly to interfere in that rollout would be inappropriate.

Now, let's make it clear that every Albertan who wants the vaccine will receive it. They may not be able to receive it in the first hour of the first day. We need to ensure that with limited supplies we get it to the most vulnerable the quickest we can, and that's the reason for the clinics as they're set up today.

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

Critical Electricity Transmission Infrastructure

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are to the Premier. The intent of this government and this Premier is clear: they want to force Albertans to pay for billions of dollars of electricity transmission lines without any independent hearing to see if those lines are actually needed. That's what Bill 50, introduced by this government, means. Why is the government taking such a casual attitude towards Albertans' money?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, a number of public hearings have been held in the province of Alberta with respect to the need for transmission. We also hear from Albertans about moving to various forms of energy – whether it be wind, solar, geothermal, biomass, coal-fired, natural gas – ensuring that there is competitiveness in the generation but also moving the energy from its source to where the consumer is. Our lines are congested. They're aging. We're losing a lot of electrons on the line as a result of the congestion, roughly a quarter of a million dollars a year. The plan is good. We'll proceed to start with the critical infrastructure that's necessary to grow this province into the future.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, many electricity experts are saying that the plan is not good, that some of the lines in this gold-plated plan are not necessary, but the government explicitly refuses to hear their points at a public interest hearing. Instead, at the last minute they're giving less than two weeks' notice for one single committee hearing. That's less notice than you get if you're being fired. Will the Premier admit that this is simply window dressing, simply cover for him on a controversial issue just before his leadership review?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I think that over the next few days we'll hear this kind of misinformation in the House, all tied to leadership. I can tell you I'm not backing away from the principles that got me here no matter what the threat from the opposition is.

Let's clarify again the misinformation that the member gave earlier. There is a policy field committee that'll be meeting on

resources and the environment. This has been instituted by this government. We've never had public policy committees ever meet in the province, and they're there to hear submissions by the public. On the 2nd and 4th we'll be hearing from the Canadian Wind Energy Association. The Sierra Club will give a presentation on grizzly bears. The Alberta Geothermal Energy Association will provide a presentation on potential for geothermal energy development. Also, the Alberta Federation of Rural Electrification Associations, the Independent Power Producers Society of Alberta, Enmax, and EPCOR are all expected to provide presentations about electricity transportation. That is fact, not what that person was talking about.

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

Just a second, hon. member. Did I hear the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre rise on a point of order?

Ms Blakeman: No, sir.

The Speaker: Now, what did the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood rise on?

Mr. Mason: A point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Okay.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now that we have that straightened out.

If the Premier thinks that having public input on Bill 50 is necessary – and Mr. Speaker, I'm not convinced that he does if he's only setting aside two days of hearings – why not pull Bill 50, send it to the standing committee for a proper series of hearings? The two-hour sessions are not nearly enough.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the bill is going to get the most public hearing right here in this Assembly. We've got a couple more stages to proceed, and it'll be done here. All these members can bring the points of view of their constituents to this House, and we'll debate the bill. That is the way democracy works, I believe.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party in the Assembly, followed by the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

2:10 Public Health System Reform

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. More than 60 per cent of Albertans think the Premier is taking Alberta in the wrong direction. Public outcry over this government's secretive health reforms and service cuts has never been louder, but the Premier says he's going to ignore it. The fact is that this PC government simply can't be trusted to protect public health care and is leaving patients out in the cold. Why is this Premier ignoring the wishes of Albertans, not to mention common sense, and continuing his reckless plan to dismantle public health care?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, as you know and this Assembly knows, this government is firmly committed to publicly funded health care. We want to make it the best ever. We want to make sure that we sustain it for the young people who are out there when they need it in the future. That is the goal: to embrace publicly funded health care, ask our health care professionals to work with government and others to ensure that we have a system that's going to be accessible,

that's going to of course improve the quality of care, and make sure that it's there for the future, meaning sustainable. Those are the goals.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This Premier refuses the opportunity to commit to support public health care. He only commits to funding publicly funded health care, which means taking taxpayers' money to pay their friends in the private health care business, insurance companies, drug companies. That's what they mean when they talk about publicly funded health care. My question is to the Premier. Will he admit that his government intends to use taxpayers' money to pay private companies to deliver private health care in this province?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker . . .

Ms Evans: Patience.

Mr. Stelmach: Take a deep breath.

. . . we're committed to publicly funded health care. Health care will continue to be delivered by professionals. You know, they try and twist and talk about the American two-tiered style of health care. I forgot about that today for some reason, but, you know, he'll keep repeating it. All I'm saying to all Albertans is that we are firmly committed to publicly funded health care. We want to work with all health care professionals so that it's the best system ever. We have the opportunity to do it right here in this province of Alberta. Why tear at each other? Let's work together and make sure that that system is here for the next generation.

Mr. Mason: More on publicly funded health care.

In the two years since he became Premier, the percentage of Albertans who think he is taking them in the wrong direction has steadily risen. They're tired of misleading announcements, tired of government secrecy, and they oppose the Premier's direction on electricity transmission, health reform, and long-term care, but the Premier's response is to stay the course. When will the Premier admit that he's chosen the wrong direction for Alberta and start listening to the people who put him where he is?

Mr. Stelmach: In some other poll that I read, 89 per cent of the public in the province of Alberta don't even know who the hon. member is. I don't know what poll he was following, but you know, we can leave the politics and the debate for later.

We're firmly – firmly – focused on making this the best system available to Albertans. You know, yesterday I had the opportunity to bring opening remarks at the Canadian Cardiovascular Congress. Over 3,000 – 3,000 – delegates came to Edmonton to talk about innovation, research, the commercialization of that, and the way we deliver cardiovascular care in Alberta, which to many at that conference says, "Alberta has taken a leadership role; we want to do what you're doing in the province of Alberta and take what you have accomplished to the other provinces so that we can reach out to as many people as you have" in terms of the kind of cardiovascular care we have in Alberta, leading across the country of Canada. Others tells us that, and he tries to drag it down.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

H1N1 Influenza Immunization

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a keen interest in the announced province-wide vaccine program for H1N1 because my constituents are frightened, and I know we know why. Many questions have arisen, and I would like the Health and Wellness minister to please tell us how rural Albertans are going to be addressed in terms of the H1N1 vaccine when in our constituencies I have 80,000 square kilometres, I have 45 communities, and we only have two places where the vaccine is going to be provided. To the minister: what are we doing for rural Albertans?

Mr. Liepert: Well, as I said earlier, Mr. Speaker, the difficulty we have today is that this is a new virus, a new vaccine, and it's still to a large extent being produced as we speak. We have limited quantities at this stage. We want to ensure that we have the maximum ability to monitor that those vaccines are getting to the appropriate individuals who are in the high-risk group. So I ask for some patience. There's no question that in rural communities, especially in isolated communities like the member's, it will take a little more time, but we're working towards getting every Albertan vaccinated.

Ms Calahasen: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the fact that we're trying to stop the whole issue of the scare tactics that are occurring, but there are a lot of scare tactics that have been occurring, whether it's through various websites or lobby groups. To the minister: could you please tell Albertans the potential time frame of immunization clinics that could occur in the next little while?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, the really good news is that this vaccine actually has come on stream some two to three weeks earlier than we had originally thought it was going to. The original belief was that it wouldn't be ready until possibly mid-November. That would have had a very compressed time frame as we led up to the holiday season. The fact that it's available here now, in the final week of October, gives us that extra three-week period. I believe that by mid-December the vaccine will have been well distributed throughout the province, and any Albertan who wants to be vaccinated will have the opportunity to do so.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Calahasen: Yes. To the same minister, Mr. Speaker: if we are going to make sure that all Albertans can be vaccinated, why then are we using mass clinics instead of getting it out to as many health care providers as possible, especially in rural Alberta?

Mr. Liepert: I would like to elaborate on the first answer. One of the problems you have if you disseminate small batches across the province is that you lose the ability to monitor whether the patient is actually receiving the vaccine. The last thing we want is having this vaccine sitting on a shelf somewhere and not getting to the appropriate individuals.

Again, I have to come back to the fact that this is a plan that has been laid out by our leading public health officials. I'm not going to sit here as an elected member and tell them that what they're doing is wrong. I believe they are the experts, and we should trust them. I would say that a month from now this will all be not an issue.

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

Inspiring Education Public Consultation

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Inspiring education? Mr. Minister, your do-as-I-say-not-as-I-do government spent millions of taxpayer dollars on a feel-good travelling public relations road show entitled Inspiring Education. You spent thousands more on self-congratulatory Success by 6 newspaper ads. The hypocritical actions of your ministry have more to do with conspiring than inspiring. Do you expect students, parents, teachers, or trustees to be inspired by your first round of \$80 million cutbacks to educational programming?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I may get to the actual question, but first I need to correct the suppositions. First of all, the advertisement with respect to Success by 6 was an advertisement on a fundraising piece that was done by me privately with an organization. It's not government money, doesn't involve government money. This is the 10th year we've run this very successful golf tournament to raise money for Success by 6 because I care about kids and their start and I care about that organization, what it does in our community.

I certainly won't apologize for spending money doing what governments do, which is to look to the horizon and plan the future. So Inspiring Education, which has been actually well accepted both in stakeholder communities and in the public as a very robust discussion about the future of education, is a very, very important investment for Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, if you want to achieve success by six, full-day kindergartens, fund them; half-day junior kindergartens, fund them; pay for breakfast programs rather than for ads. Are teachers to be inspired by a five-year contract, supposedly bargained in good faith, whose conditions have been unilaterally rewritten by your government halfway through the term?

2:20

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I guess we'll get back to the \$80 million later, but on the average weekly earnings question, that is implicit in what the hon. member has said, again I need to correct the misapprehension that he's put forward. Nobody has ripped up any contracts or in any way denigrated the contracts. There's a very simple issue to be determined, and that is the question of how you determine average weekly earnings when the people who used to determine it changed the process. The contracts were written on one basis. There's a new basis in place. There's a very legitimate discussion between ourselves and the ATA with respect to how that should be calculated. We have agreed with the ATA to move forward in arbitration on that issue. It's not a question of not honouring the contracts – we want to honour the contracts; we will honour the contracts – but we do need to have an interpretation of the meaning of that term.

Mr. Chase: Then we have our Premier going around with a cup to public-sector unions saying: please take a wage freeze. I suppose that's part of the contract.

Do you honestly believe that grade 12 students, forced by your ministry's failure to schedule appropriately, will be inspired by having to write math and chem 30 exams on the same day?

Mr. Hancock: First of all, they won't have to write chem 30 and math on the same day. A schedule is going out. There was a schedule published. Two jurisdictions indicated that. As soon as I got feedback that that was what happened – I hadn't seen it – I said to my department that it's not appropriate to have two exams of that

nature on the same day and that we needed that fixed. The new announcement with respect to the exam schedule will be out imminently.

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

H1N1 Influenza Immunization for Homeless People

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Obviously, and rightly so, there is a great deal of discussion regarding pandemic planning for H1N1. My question is for the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs. What is your ministry doing to prepare for the second wave of the outbreak, with specific reference to our homeless population?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you know, the homeless population is extremely vulnerable to the H1N1 virus, and they have very complex needs and a host of other needs as well. I can tell you that since they live in close quarters, traditional advice like stay home and rest is just not going to work.

Hon. member, we have taken this very seriously, and in fact, Mr. Speaker, I can tell you as well that immunization clinics will be offered at shelters on-site. They are expected to begin as early as this Friday, and you'll be pleased to know that our homeless population, whether they're sheltered or unsheltered, will be immunized on an urgent basis.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second and final question is for the same minister. Obviously, we can't afford delays or duplications for these important people. What has the minister's focus of discussion been with the Ministry of Health and Wellness in this respect?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, this is a question I have heard before, and I've heard it repeatedly. We have been working closely with Alberta Health and Wellness. We've been working closely as well with Alberta Health Services for several months, and that's to develop a pandemic planning guide, which I reviewed with my staff as recently as last week and have, you know, a number of times over the past few months. That guide, I can tell you, speaks to prevention, how to slow or stop the transmission of the virus. It outlines the resources that are available. It gives a very clear communication protocol, that they will notify health officials, notify officials in our department whether or not there have been any of their people that have been infected with the virus. I'm confident that our shelter advisers or shelter operators, our medical support staff, that people were talking about here earlier, are all very well prepared to deal with this virus in our shelters.

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

H1N1 Influenza Immunization (continued)

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. In his ministerial statement the minister said, "Alberta Health Services will also look at the possibility of resuming immunization programs for the seasonal flu in seniors' lodges once a critical mass of the general population has been immunized for H1N1." Will the minister tell this Assembly what per cent of

Albertans need to be immunized for H1N1 to reach that critical mass?

Mr. Liepert: I don't know if there's a specific number that I can lay out today. That will be a judgment call by the chief medical officer of health and public health officials across the province.

You know, the other issue that we have to keep in mind here, Mr. Speaker, is that this is out of the norm when it comes to delivery of health care services, and we want to ensure that we've got the right professionals involved in this particular immunization. There will be some hiccups as we move through it, but we're going to work to ensure that the process is as smooth as possible.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Thanks. Again to the same minister: will this minister take action and immediately order the opening of H1N1 vaccination clinics at seniors' facilities? This would reduce waiting times at mass clinics and, frankly, relieve stress on worried seniors who have to travel, stand, go to great lengths. Will he push that forward immediately?

Mr. Liepert: I didn't catch the very outset. Is the member referring to the seasonal flu or the H1N1?

Dr. Taft: The H1N1.

Mr. Liepert: Well, I think I answered that question before. The intent with H1N1 is to get to the most vulnerable as quickly as possible. It has been determined that our seniors population is not the most vulnerable to the H1N1 virus. It clearly has been with the other seasonal flu, and that's why over the past couple of weeks we've had the seasonal flu vaccination program under way, and it has focused on our seniors population.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Thanks again. H1N1 is unusual – obviously, the minister knows – in that it hits young people particularly hard, yet as far as we can see, there are no clinics where young people are most concentrated, in postsecondary institutions. Again to the minister: will the minister take action and immediately order that vaccination clinics for H1N1 be opened at major postsecondary institutions?

Mr. Liepert: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, either the member is not listening or is choosing to misinterpret the facts. As I said in my statement, those most vulnerable are between the ages of six months and five years. The last time I checked, none of those go to postsecondary institutions. I also said that those who are most vulnerable are those under 60 with chronic conditions, and for the most part that doesn't include those who are in mass numbers at postsecondary institutions. But I will say that once we get those who are the most vulnerable, once we get additional supplies, we will ensure that on workplace sites, at universities, where there is the ability to vaccinate a mass number of people, we will do that.

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

Liability Insurance for Search and Rescue Organizations

Mr. Benito: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Recent media stories have focused on the lack of liability insurance protection for some Alberta search and rescue teams, which may result in volunteers withdrawing their services. Search and rescue plays a vital role

during emergencies, and I've experienced this first-hand in my Fire Ops 101. My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Can the minister tell Albertans what is being done to address this issue?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I do want to say that search and rescue is a very important part of our emergency management system. We have been working with Search and Rescue Alberta to address these issues with them.

Mr. Speaker, if I can say, when volunteers go on a search and rescue mission, they should not be liable. I will say that at the outset. As well, we are examining all the options of liability and disability coverage for the volunteers that are involved in search and rescue.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Benito: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is for the same minister. Can the minister tell us if the liability insurance issue is unique to Alberta?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, in fact, we did meet with the president of Search and Rescue Canada this morning, and it provided us with a national perspective. We are very close to reaching an interim solution, and we hope to finalize this in the very near future.

Also, Mr. Speaker, in January we are hosting the federal-provincial-territorial ministers' meeting, and we're going to discuss at that time with the ministers involved how we can be more responsive in a long-term solution for this challenge. It's very important to note that we are supporting the fundamental safety services to Alberta.

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Benito: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. My final question is for the same minister. Can the minister tell us what support there currently is for search and rescue groups?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, at the present time we have well-trained and responsive search and rescue teams, and in part of our commitment to those teams we're providing \$150,000 a year for training. We provide WCB coverage. We're also working with the search and rescue teams to develop training and certification standards. Also, this last weekend we supported an exercise that took place at Rocky Mountain House, the largest of its kind in Alberta. Because of this support Albertans can have confidence that their safety and security are being well served by search and rescue.

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

Contentious WCB Claims

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are for the Minister of Employment and Immigration. My first question is this: why has the government failed in the last seven years to implement a long-standing contentious claims review tribunal to once and for all have a look at many of the frustrated injured workers and their files at the WCB?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member refers, no doubt, to the Doerksen report and the Judge Friedman report. There were a series of reports going back as far as 2000 making recommendations for changes. Since 2000 there have been a number of changes that have been instituted at the WCB level. There were at that particular time, in 2000, about 59 recommendations that were made, and I'm pleased to announce that we've made progress on the majority of those recommendations.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's not what the injured workers would have to say.

Again to the hon. minister. An amendment was passed to the workers' compensation legislation in 2002 to implement a long-standing contentious claims review tribunal. Why has the government failed to implement that and take one final look at many of the issues that the injured workers bring up in our constituency offices almost on a weekly basis?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, the member I think alludes to Bill 26, which paved the way at that particular time, in 2002, to set up the Appeals Commission as an independent, arm's-length body, and that was done. The process now of hearing appeals has been changed since that particular time. The Appeals Commission was given a lot more independence and, rather than responding to WCB directly, is responding to me as the minister, certainly removing that relationship that they had with the WCB, enabling them to give better hearings.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. Again to the same minister: given that the amendments to the act that were voted on by this Assembly give the hon. minister the power through regulation to set up a tribunal that will once and for all have a look at these long-standing contentious claims, why is the minister and why is the government refusing to at least look one final time in the files of these injured workers and see if there's not something we can do to help them?

Thank you.

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, there were a number of changes that were made, but one thing that stays common is that if there is new information that pertains to that particular individual, new medical information, then the individual's files would be reviewed. Having said that, if there is no additional information, we would suspect that the decision would be the same as it has always been. Now, since then there were other changes that occurred in terms of operating files from 2002 and on. We've evolved and WCB has evolved a new way of resolving appeals which actually focuses on resolution, modification, and various agreements wherever that is possible. There has been a new medical panel established and a number of other things.

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

Long-term Care

Ms. Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In January of 2008, conveniently on the eve of the last election, the Premier claimed he would create 600 new long-term care beds. However, the true plans of the most secretive government in Canada were brought to light in a

leaked document that our caucus released in September, a report that called for the closure of thousands of long-term care beds. To the minister of health: how can he explain the difference between what the government says to the public and what they ask the staff to plan behind closed doors?

Mr. Liepert: As the Premier outlined in the House earlier, we believe strongly on this side of the House that you create a health care delivery system where you take the care to the patient and not make the patient fit into some system that some group has designed that may very well be out of date. What we have in this province, Mr. Speaker, what we are moving towards is a continuum of care, and in places where seniors reside – it may be their own home, it may be a lodge environment, and it may be assisted living – we're going to offer the opportunity to provide care in that facility where that particular patient feels more comfortable. If that's not good enough for those who are advocating on behalf of some of their supporters who happen to fund them, well, that's just too bad.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, there are about 800 senior citizens right now who would prefer to be in a long-term care bed, and they can't get one. Meanwhile, services that are critical to seniors' health which are free to long-term care patients will be transferred to assisted living facilities, and those services will be part of a thousand-dollar-a-month special service contract when those seniors live there. What will the health minister say to the seniors who simply will not be able to afford the care they need in the place that they did not ask for, that this government forced them into by cutting long-term care beds?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, any senior that needs health care gets health care. That's part of the system, the universal, publicly funded health care system that we have in this province. I would challenge that particular member to get out of the city of Edmonton, travel this province, visit some of the facilities that our seniors are living in, and see the care that's provided in those facilities instead of listening to these dredged-up reports that are sometimes a decade old that seem to be the genesis for scaring people, fearmongering, political rhetoric. I could go on and on and on, but that's what it is.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, (a) the report I'm referring to is actually six months old, not 10 years old, and (b) just last week I was in Medicine Hat, where I was told that not one person in long-term care could possibly survive in a meaningful, healthy way if they were asked to be in assisted living.

During the election the government made grand promises to care for our seniors, but once they got behind closed doors, they abandoned them. Why won't the minister once and for all stop his secretive plan to download costs onto the backs of Alberta seniors?

Mr. Liepert: Well, my guess is that the people that that member was talking to probably belong to a public-sector union or the so-called enemies of medicare or one of these groups that is just part of their little organization out there, Mr. Speaker. I heartily doubt that that member even bothered to venture in to visit with seniors in a particular facility.

Last week in Lethbridge with the Member for Lethbridge-West we visited a facility that I challenge the Member for Lethbridge-East, whose constituency it resides in – there is not one member of this Assembly who would not die to have that particular facility in their constituency.

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

Critical Electricity Transmission Infrastructure (continued)

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Calgary city council and Enmax are united in their opposition to Bill 50 and the transmission line between Calgary and Edmonton. They are telling us it is very costly, not needed, and was decided without proper public consultation. Can the Minister of Energy explain or identify the benefits of this line to Calgarians, please?

The Speaker: Briefly, Minister, as this bill will be up for debate during this session.

Mr. Knight: Yes. What I can do is indicate to the member that a robust grid in the province of Alberta allows the least-cost generation to reach all Albertans, not just the member's constituents but all Albertans. Most certainly, Mr. Speaker, reliability of the system is paramount, and no generation facility operates 24/7, 365 days a year. The reliability of delivery to the citizens of Calgary is paramount in this discussion.

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister. There is a lot of confusion about the role of AESO. Could the minister explain as to what AESO is, who appoints AESO members, and does AESO have the authority to make recommendations that will cost Albertans billions of dollars?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, with the situation, of course, that we have in front of us with the transmission upgrade, quite simply, when you look at the pieces of it, if we're talking about the upgrade that would happen in south Calgary, again it amounts to reliability. The number of people that are in the south Calgary area now, including but not limited to a new hospital, require that reliability of the system. It's that reliability that will affect and in fact enhance the opportunities for Calgarians along with all Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I understand that there is a major upgrade planned for a Calgary substation. Can the minister elaborate on this project and, with this upgrade, if the transmission is still needed?

Mr. Knight: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, I think that the answer is similar to the ones before. What happens there with respect to south Calgary, quite honestly, is very little argument relative to that particular issue. Calgarians understand that those pieces of infrastructure are needed – are urgently needed – in Calgary. They need the reliability, and they certainly are going to get it when we continue to build into this transmission system.

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

Water Allocation

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Environment minister, living firmly in the past, said last week that the first in time, first in right, or FITFIR, system has served reasonably well over the last hundred years. But FITFIR does not protect drinking water or the environment during periods of drought. My questions are to the minister. Times have changed. Why is the minister not

willing to take the recommendations made by numerous water groups, including some of his own, and update this legislation to put people before industry and not some antiquated system of whoever got there first?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm surprised that the member would suggest to this House that the decisions have already been made. I can assure her, as I have been assuring Albertans, that that's far from the truth. What we have committed to is to engage in a discussion around a new revised water allocation policy. That discussion has yet to take place. What I have said is that we have to look at ways that will recognize some of the historic rights associated with water but will also allow us to share the water and recognize that this is a limited resource that must be accessible to all Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that the South Saskatchewan River has recently been rated the most threatened river in Canada and studies show that with climate change, a growing population, and expanding industry the river will become even drier, why is the minister insisting that merely tinkering with the allocation system will be enough to meet the looming water crisis?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, let's be very clear. We have a standing agreement in place with our downstream neighbours, namely Saskatchewan, that 50 per cent of the stream flow will flow through to Saskatchewan. So to paint this as nearly dry is an exaggeration in the extreme. That being said, that is one of the basins that we're concentrating on because clearly there is, as we speak, a moratorium on additional licences. That doesn't mean that there is not sufficient water for new development. It means that some of the existing users are going to have to have a facility to share the water with some of the new users.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: given that Albertans' right to water for their basic human needs is already compromised by the current system, why won't the minister commit to completely overhauling the highly inefficient water allocation system and prioritize the basic human needs of Albertans over uses of water such as watering lawns and golf courses? Albertans first.

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I think that's kind of what we're doing. There are a number of needs associated with water. Basic human needs are absolutely critical, no doubt, but so are the needs of the watershed itself. Healthy aquatic ecosystems are equally important. If we don't maintain the viability of the river, then we compromise in a significant way the enjoyment of humans to consume that water. Mr. Speaker, that is very much the purpose of the discussion that we are about to enter into.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo*.

Electricity Transmission Upgrades

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituents have had many questions regarding the need for new transmission lines in our electricity system. My questions are for the Minister of Energy.

Albertans are hearing many conflicting messages concerning the cost of transmission upgrades. Can you please clarify what the cost to Alberta consumers would actually be?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, yes, I most certainly can. In general terms, for every billion dollars of capital deployed to build infrastructure in the transmission system in Alberta, the average consumer at home would pay about \$1 per month.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: if consumers are faced with the possibility of an additional cost, \$1 per month, on their bills, can you please explain what benefits they would see with increased transmission capacity?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, yes. Again, Mr. Speaker, I certainly can. If you look at the system that we have in Alberta currently, the system is aging, definitely. You know, we're all aging, and the system is aging. What we need to do is get some new technology on the ground in Alberta – more efficient, moves power better, less line loss – and at the end of the day I believe that Albertans will see the benefit in the economics and in the reliability of the system to supply the power that they require.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question to the same minister: can you please clarify the steps that will occur with respect to the rollout of the transmission upgrades? There seems to be a lot of confusion around that.

Mr. Knight: Well, again, as we go forward with respect to the transmission system, as the determination is brought forward by AESO that the system needs to be upgraded and reinforced, what will happen is that the pieces that are required to be built will go through the system of consultation through the AUC for the permit and licensing, siting, the cost, and the technology used. By the way, Mr. Speaker, the AUC will as part of their mandate determine these things in the public interest, and they'll move forward in a timely manner over, probably, the next couple of decades.

Police Officer Supply

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, both Edmonton and Calgary's police forces are dramatically understaffed in comparison to other Canadian cities in terms of the number of police officers per capita. Recently the Edmonton Police Commission noted that it would need to reduce the number of sworn police officers on its city streets during this budget cycle. My question today is for the Solicitor General: will the Edmonton Police Service be receiving the funds promised by the government in order to recruit and hire 35 new members this year?

The Speaker: The hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security.

Mr. Lindsay: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to remind the hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo* that the Premier of this province promised 300 additional police officers over three years, and we've actually met that goal over the first two years. However, that being said, we're in the budgeting process, and we'll review that budget.

Hopefully we'll be able to provide additional police services to both Edmonton and Calgary and the RCMP.

Mr. Hehr: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's the type of answer that I'm worried about. We've had that type of answer in the media now here this afternoon.

Given that the Edmonton Police Service is already understaffed compared to other major cities, why can't you confirm with us that it is going to be a priority of your government to get the additional 35 officers out the door?

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, looking back on the last two years and the gains that this government has made in regard to policing and safe communities in the province, I don't think we have to take a back seat to anybody. As I've indicated, we're in the budgeting process, and depending on how things go, we'll see what the outcome is.

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, although I hear the Solicitor General, those gains have still left us 20 per cent behind other major centres in terms of policing numbers. Why won't this government commit to having a safe and secure number of police officers on our city streets?

2:50

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, in regard to safe and secure communities we have seen a downturn in the crime rate in this province. With the steps that we've taken, we're assured that, hopefully, those things will continue to follow in that direction.

Also, the hon. member doesn't speak to the fact that since 2006 we've formed ALERT, which also has played a big role in crime reduction in this province. In fact, in the last year it has taken about \$85 million worth of illegal drugs off the streets of this province, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 88 questions and responses today, and we're now going to come up against a standing order again at 3 o'clock.

Members' Statements

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

Bev Thirsk Robert Thirsk

Mr. Rodney: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Bev Thirsk and Robert Thirsk are truly inspirational Albertans. Bev is a greatly gifted educator who is as talented as she is humble. Recently Bev shared a fabulous presentation with all in her school, documenting her experience in Russia last spring to watch her brother, Bob Thirsk, blast into outer space. The students then dressed up in space-themed costumes. Everyone was mesmerized by a 10-minute Q and A session with Bob as he orbited Earth in the International Space Station, and all responded to the event through composition, art, and music.

After I spoke with Bev a number of months ago when Bob was honoured by the U of C with an honorary doctorate, she was kind enough to contact him directly on the ISS, and he was kind enough to respond with the following unedited passage:

Dear fellow Albertans:

It is with great pride that I represent my country on our first long-duration mission on the International Space Station. I have now lived and worked aboard the station for more than four months. My days are incredibly busy, sometimes challenging but never

boring. My duties include the ongoing maintenance of my new home, manipulation of Canada's robotic jewel, the Canadarm2, and participation in a number of world-class science experiments on behalf of Canadian researchers and the international scientific community.

In spite of my hectic schedule I do take the time to enjoy the spectacular views of our planet. Every time I fly over Canada, I look down in awe. I feel particularly closer to home when we pass over Alberta, the province where I grew up and completed some of my education which was pivotal in preparing me for this incredible endeavour.

To all my fellow Albertans I say thank you for your support. Your pioneering spirit sustains me on this mission of exploration. In the new year I look forward to visiting Alberta and sharing with you this incredible journey.

Mr. Speaker, I invite all members of this Assembly to join me in thanking and congratulating Bev Thirsk and Robert Thirsk for proving that, indeed, the sky is not the limit.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Premier's Awards of Excellence

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to take this opportunity to recognize the dedication and innovation of the Alberta public service in improving services for Albertans. At the 15th annual Premier's awards of excellence ceremony 25 teams of provincial government employees received awards for very diverse projects. The contributions of more than 1,400 members of the Alberta public service were acknowledged.

The Premier's awards of excellence exemplify superior client service, excellence in business practices, and outstanding leadership. The recipients' projects ranged from infrastructure projects to social work, from promoting the province internationally to streamlining regulations. As well, some initiatives involved provincial cultural events and technological advancements.

Provincial employees honoured at the ceremony work across the province. Their achievements have benefited Albertans across the province as well. This collective work, Mr. Speaker, demonstrates how the public service is continually improving the lives of the people that we serve. Since 1995 375 teams of employees have received the honour of distinction.

Mr. Speaker, the Alberta public service works hard every day to improve the lives of Albertans. I would like to congratulate the recipients of these prestigious awards. Heartfelt thanks to all public servants for their ongoing hard work, creativity, and commitment to excellence.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

It's a Crime Not to Read Program

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Late last month I attended the Calgary Public Library Foundation awards recognizing excellence in Alberta's literary community. As part of that celebration the Calgary public library and the Calgary Police Service celebrated an innovative partnership called It's a Crime Not to Read. The program involves police officers visiting grades 2 and 3 classrooms to read aloud to children and to encourage reading and literacy.

It's a Crime Not to Read allows the police to have positive interaction with kids and their families, building a sense of trust and rapport. Research has shown that children who read and do well in school are much less likely to participate in criminal activities. This important program helps set children on the right path in life.

For libraries the program introduced the public library as a welcoming, safe, exciting, and friendly place in the community. If we can get a child to cross the threshold of a public library, we can change their life forever and for the better.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta has much to be proud of in its public library system. Programs such as It's a Crime Not to Read demonstrate the innovative approach our libraries take as they enhance the quality of life in our community. Today's library is about bringing people and ideas together. A library is about building literacy of all kinds: reading literacy, computer literacy, financial literacy, health literacy, and more. There are few organizations that touch as many lives as our public libraries.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to salute Alberta's public libraries and their inventive approaches to building informed, literate, inspired, and productive communities and individuals in every corner of our great province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Fiscal Accountability

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Dickens, Douglas, and Duckett. When purely mathematical solutions are applied to ethical questions, the result is frequently failure. Charles Dickens described the dreariness and drudgery of those struggling to eke out an existence in Victorian England. In Dickens' fact-based fiction wealth of character triumphed over poverty of person in his tales of redemption.

With less than 10 shopping weeks remaining till Christmas, our fiscal surplus has vanished for the second time in 20 years, replaced by a deficit in the billions. The Premier has assumed the role of a very convincing penny-wise, pound-foolish Scrooge. His much alive and callously calculating accomplice, Stephen Duckett of superbard infamy, is the present stand-in for Scrooge's former partner and mentor, Marley.

As the plot unfolds, spectre Stephen warns our in-the-red Premier that he will be visited by three spirits. As the bell tolls, the ghostly Getty appears to warn our Alberta Scrooge about the perils of betting on the future by borrowing in the past, which ultimately ends in bust. On cue the second ghost arrives in the person of former New Zealand slash-and-burn 1990s fiscal failure, Sir Roger Douglas, whose philosophy, so closely followed by the man without a plan, Ralph Klein, led to Alberta's late 1990s bust-to-boom body count. The third and final phantom, in the spectral form of Peter Lougheed, points the way towards environmental, economic, and social redemption if the Premier will only listen and thereby recover from his personal repeat role in Alberta's boom-and-bust cycle.

Will the current irrational funding cuts to Children's Services, Education, Health, and Seniors produce less disastrous results than those previously felt under Getty and Klein? Will the Premier face his own knives of November with his upcoming leadership review? Will the Premier last long enough to learn the lesson lost to his former colleagues, that a society is judged by the way it treats its most vulnerable? Let's hope and pray for a Dickensian denouement to the current moral malaise playing out in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

School Libraries

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. October 26 marks the seventh annual National School Library Day. Today across the province school library staff will be holding book fairs, celebrating excellence in school library programs, hosting guest speakers, and

linking up with community organizations to highlight the vital role of school libraries in the lives of our students.

The libraries in Alberta's schools contribute to students' social, cultural, artistic, and academic development, which help create a foundation for success in everyday life. I think that everyone in this House has fond memories of visiting their school library, perhaps to choose a favourite book, and the special pride we took in being able to take that book home and share it with our family and friends. School libraries are often the hub of the school, providing a place for students to gather, share, learn, be creative, and use their imaginations.

Mr. Speaker, October is also Canadian Library Month. Last year I had the privilege of chairing the MLA Committee on the Future of Public Library Service in Alberta. It gave me the opportunity to connect with many Albertans who are passionate and committed to quality library service in our province. Alberta has benefited from the deep dedication of these people, and their dedication is matched by this government, which is also committed to a strong, province-wide public libraries system.

I'm pleased to rise today to honour the National School Library Day, the Canadian Library Month, and the many people who tirelessly support our libraries. In particular, I'd like to recognize the Canadian Association for School Libraries for its hard work to promote awareness and the importance of libraries in our schools and communities. I'd also like to recognize the teachers, parents, and principals who work hard to ensure school libraries stay a strong and integral part of the educational experience of our students.

Thank you.

3:00

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 7(7) reads: "At 3 p.m. the items in the ordinary daily routine will be deemed to be concluded and the Speaker shall notify the Assembly."

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader has caught my eye.

Mr. Renner: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Following the lead of the Government House Leader and hoping for a similar outcome, I would like to seek unanimous consent to waive standing orders today only so that we may proceed with completion of the daily Routine. With some extenuating circumstances with ministerial statements, et cetera, I think it's appropriate that the members consider waiving the standing order, again, today only.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the request has been made for unanimous consent to waive Standing Order 7(7). I will ask the question, and the question will be the following: does any member object to our waiving the standing orders so that we may conclude the Routine? If so, say no.

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

Family Doctor Week

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise and recognize October 26 to 30 as Family Doctor Week across Canada. This week across our nation we proudly acknowledge Canadian family physicians for their dedication to patients and their communities and their outstanding contribution to the delivery of high-quality health care.

The Alberta College of Family Physicians and the College of Family Physicians of Canada will cohost the annual Family Medicine Forum this Thursday to Saturday in Calgary. The purpose

of the forum is to provide family physicians from Alberta and regions across this nation with the opportunity to sharpen their knowledge and skills by participating in continuing medical education sessions.

Mr. Speaker, family doctors directly impact the health of individual Albertans and the health care system as a whole. In fact, adding a family doctor to a community improves access while at the same time reducing costs and human suffering and mortality. Each day family physicians make diagnoses, treat patients, and co-ordinate care with other health care disciplines. They advocate on behalf of their patients and their communities to promote health and prevent illness.

This week I encourage everyone to take time to thank their family physician for the care and advice and compassion given on a daily basis. I would ask my hon. colleagues to join me in thanking family physicians for their dedication to improving the health and wellness of all Albertans and all Canadians.

Presenting Petitions

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

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like today to present a petition on behalf of 105 Albertans. The petition reads as follows: we the undersigned residents of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to pass legislation to deinsure abortion in Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 53

Professional Corporations Statutes Amendment Act, 2009

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure today and I request leave to introduce Bill 53, the Professional Corporations Statutes Amendment Act, 2009.

This amendment will extend nonvoting share ownership of professional corporations to family members. If passed, our province's accountants, lawyers, doctors, dentists, chiropractors, and optometrists will have the ability to access some of the benefits of being incorporated, including some tax benefits. These benefits are currently enjoyed by the same professions in other western provinces.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 53 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 53 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

Bill 55

Senatorial Selection Amendment Act, 2009

Mr. Webber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to move first reading of Bill 55, the Senatorial Selection Amendment Act, 2009.

The current act is set to expire on December 31, 2010. We are

proposing an amendment to the act which would extend the act to December 31, 2016. This allows the Alberta government to hold Senate elections beyond 2010 should we decide to do so.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 55 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of a publication entitled Racism-Free Workplace Strategy: Breaking the Barriers, National Summary.

My second tabling is the appropriate number of copies of Book of Proceedings: Breaking the Barriers Open Session, Racism-Free Works!

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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 a letter I received from Katherine Wilson, one of my constituents. The letter describes how her husband waited in an acute-care bed for a space in long-term care but died before a space became available. She says that the system desperately needs "more continuing care beds, more nurses, and more doctors."

Thank you.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have three letters today from constituents, that have come in since the break. The first is from Margaret Doran, who writes with her concerns around health services and particularly the appointment of Dr. Duckett and some of the choices he's made. She states that his "ideas and 'objectives' are not welcome" and that he should tell his boss.

The second tabling is regarding the tents at the Stollery for the treatment of children. Jenny Adams, also a constituent, raises her concerns about losing specially skilled doctors to work in other hospitals because we don't have a proper facility and notes that "sick kids are our future too."

The final letter is from Marianne B. Hemery, who asks, "Why are Electric cars not Road Legal in the province of Alberta?" and notes that she's appalled at the callous disregard of the Conservative government "for the poisoning of our beautiful land by the Oil Companies."

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Hon. members, I have a number of tablings that I have to deal with today. First of all, I'm going to table copies of a chart demonstrating the operation of the new rotation for Oral Question Period along with five copies of the new projected sitting days calendar for the fall sitting. In addition to tabling this, I'm going to have circulated to all members this rotation as well.

Secondly, I'm also tabling copies of a letter dated October 19, 2009, from the Member for Calgary-Foothills advising me of the resignation of that member from the Standing Committee on Resources and Environment, the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices, and the Select Special Chief Electoral Officer Search Committee.

Third, I wish to table with the Assembly five copies of a letter dated October 23, 2009, from the Ethics Commissioner together with an enclosure titled: quick guide for members. The chair is advised that the guide is intended to serve as a general overview of the interpretation of the Conflicts of Interest Act as to what might constitute a private interest in the act. Members will recall that this was one of the items suggested in the chair's June 3 ruling on the question of privilege raised by the Member for Edmonton-Riverview, found at pages 1512-13 of *Hansard* for that day. In addition to tabling these appropriate copies, I'm going to ask to ensure that the Clerk will have appropriate copies made for all members and circulated in the House this afternoon.

In addition, I'm also tabling copies of a brochure produced by the Legislative Assembly of Alberta titled Page Biographies, Legislative Assembly of Alberta, 27th Legislature, Second Session, Fall 2009, where we have a number of new pages that are in our midst.

Hon. members, pursuant to section 46(2) of the Conflicts of Interest Act the chair is pleased to table with the Assembly the annual report of the Ethics Commissioner covering the period April 1, 2008, to March 31, 2009. I distributed copies to members on September 3, 2009, but pursuant to Standing Order 55.01 this report now stands referred to the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices.

The last tabling today is pursuant to section 28(1) of the Ombudsman Act. The chair is pleased to table with the Assembly the 42nd annual report of the office of the Ombudsman for the period April 1, 2008, to March 31, 2009. This report was previously distributed to members on Tuesday, October 13, 2009.

3:10 **Tablings to the Clerk**

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mrs. Tarchuk, Minister of Children and Youth Services, responses to questions raised by Ms Notley, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, and Mr. Chase, the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, on May 6, 2009, Department of Children and Youth Services main estimates debate.

Statement by the Speaker

Identification of Members on the Seating Plan

The Speaker: Hon. members, we will proceed shortly, but just one point of clarification. Interestingly enough, on days such as this when there have been changes in the Assembly, the chair does receive a number of notes as to: why is so-and-so referred to as such? As an example, in our seating plan if you are a member of the majority party, you are listed in here as an Alberta Progressive Conservative. If you are a member of the Official Opposition, you are listed in here as a member of the Alberta Liberals. If you are a member of the third party, you are part of the Alberta New Democrats, and we have listed in here a member from the Alberta Wildrose Alliance and an independent.

The question is: how come we're not calling the other two independents? Why are we identifying Wildrose? Well, historically we recognize individuals according to their party affiliation by which they have been elected, and the Member for Calgary-Glenmore was elected as a member of the Alberta Wildrose Alliance. Historically those members who have either voluntarily or involuntarily left the caucus in which they were elected a member, we refer to them as an independent. That's why the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo is referred to as an independent.

This goes back in precedent to our previous seating plan that we

had, that members can look at. Going back to the previous seating plan of 2008, the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner was referred to as a member of the Alberta Alliance, and the Member for Edmonton-Manning, when he either voluntarily or involuntarily left the caucus he was with, was identified as an independent. That's the historical clarification for the rationale to describe the way this occurs. So if one of your colleagues who may be away, out of my speaking sound limits right now, may ask that question of you, you now know the answer to it forever and ever.

We have no point of order. After due deliberation by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood the hon. member has declined to participate further in this.

Orders of the Day

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

Bill 206

School (Enhanced Protection of Students and Teachers) Amendment Act, 2009

[Debate adjourned June 1]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona was participating. Whom shall I recognize next?

The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure to rise today to speak in favour of Bill 206, the School (Enhanced Protection of Students and Teachers) Amendment Act, 2009, brought forward by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. I commend this Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. This act is a forward-looking act because Bill 206 works towards maintaining the safety and security of our schools and our students. Of course, it does this by mandating the documentation of students' actions by defining which actions are considered inappropriate and by giving schools the tools to deal with difficult situations. Providing schools the additional tools of allowing police intervention and consultation when dealing with serious situations is a giant step forward.

Since my teaching years bullying has evolved. It is my understanding that it can now be more aggressive and involve new mediums like the Internet. Bill 206 would allow our disciplinary measures to evolve similarly. Bill 206 accounts for the fact that one type of recourse is not suitable for every student who bullies. Mr. Speaker, kids experiment – we know that – some simply for the sake of experience. For many of these students time outs or being sent to the principal's office can be very effective. For others, however, it may not be.

If these students remain unco-operative and their indiscretions become severe, teachers and principals have few options with the exception of suspension and, in extreme cases, expulsion to compel their students to behave appropriately. These measures, however, are a last resort, and even then, Mr. Speaker, they do not effectively address the issue. While these penalties send a message to a student, a message of "this behaviour will not be tolerated," the consequence can just as easily be spun into a reward of sorts for a student who has a limited desire to attend school in the first place, and we've seen plenty of that.

Mr. Speaker, I fear that sometimes these are not really punitive measures for the student. Further, it is likely that these students, who are already misbehaving, will simply find peers outside of the school who facilitate their negative behaviours. This may in the end heighten the draw to skip class, a result that completely counteracts

the initial goal, which is to motivate the student to attend school, to behave more appropriately, and to improve their performance. The fact is that as soon as the student is off school property, staff are unable to observe and assist them in any way, which can be, in the end, counterproductive.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Speaker, an article published in the *Globe and Mail* addressed the issue of expelling and moving students to new schools. The article draws attention to the fact that students who have a disposition to violent behaviour are highly likely to find new conflicts in a new environment in which they are placed. School resource officers have said that in the case of students who are drug trafficking, a school transfer simply means a whole new set of clientele. Often these students face multiple expulsions until they end up on the street, and then the issue is one of community safety. Sometimes they will simply drop out before disciplinary measures force them to do so.

It has been shown that schools that issue more suspensions have higher dropout rates. This makes for a tough balance for school staff and school boards. They have to seriously consider, when contemplating suspension and expulsion, what is best for the student who has misbehaved and what is best for the school environment.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 206 creates a new way to manage bullying behaviour, one that has a renewed sense of promise. First, by requiring the documentation of these behaviours, students are being held accountable for their actions. Mistakes made by students will not simply be forgotten, and in cases where the behaviour is repetitive, these records can be accessed to show ongoing or escalating behaviour. This, indeed, is a powerful message. This bill will provide an alternative to a traditional school suspension or expulsion by bringing together the principal, the parents, the student, and the police to discuss an appropriate and effective course of action for serious bullying. It will convey the message that bullying will not be tolerated.

Mr. Speaker, psychologically these students need support, and an expulsion does not provide that support. Suspension or expulsion is unlikely to motivate change. That is why I believe these alternatives are crucial. Keeping children in school is important to Alberta Education, to local authorities, to communities, and to parents. Bill 206 would provide the needed tools to address bullying and will provide students with the opportunity to recognize and change their behaviour patterns.

Mr. Speaker, speaking as a former teacher, I stand before this Assembly in full support of Bill 206. Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I am very pleased that the mover of Bill 206, the School (Enhanced Protection of Students and Teachers) Amendment Act, 2009, brought it forward, and I give credit where credit is due to the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for having thoughtfully brought this forward.

I want this to succeed for a variety of reasons, Mr. Speaker. The first is to honour the memory of a young high school student, Alex Wedman, who is no longer with us because of bullying. Alex suffered bullying in junior high school. He was so severely kicked in the groin that he required several stitches to help to remediate the problem.

The bullying he received in junior high school followed him to high school. When he graduated from grade 10, he tried to leave his bully behind by switching high schools here in Edmonton. Unfortu-

nately, on the first day of registration in his new high school to his horror and to his family's horror, the bully had shown up in the new school to which he was transferred. Attention was brought by Alex's mother and father to a variety of individuals within the school system all along the course of the bullying. Unfortunately, the interventions were not sufficient, and Alex Wedman went into his parents' garage, turned on the vehicle, and as a result committed suicide because he could no longer take the bullying that he had received.

3:20

This is a very sad circumstance which this bill is attempting to address. This past fall we heard of children being hazed with hockey sticks, some with nail studs, down in the southern portion of the province. There is a sort of male, foolish rule that suggests that you keep it to yourself, you tough through it, that you go through initiation processes, and that's part of being a man. Well, I suggest that beating or being the recipient of a beating has nothing to do with manhood. It's physical violence. It should not be tolerated.

Now, in order for Bill 206 to have an effect, it needs to have funding attached. It needs to have education components attached. The education components have to start at the earliest grades. Kindergarten children, or if we ever have junior kindergarten in this province, need to be given the opportunity to have the whole notion of bullying discussed. Teachers require in-service in order to recognize the characteristics of bullying. In the case of elementary schools be on the lookout for it at recess. In junior high schools be on the lookout for it during classroom discussions. Quite often the bullying takes place in phys ed classes, where a shot is given or a smack on the back is delivered.

We need teachers to be given the type of in-service training so that they can recognize and react to bullying early on so that situations that occurred to Alex Wedman do not occur to other students. Far too many children in this province have committed suicide because they have been driven to it by relentless bullying. It's extremely important in the universities as part of curriculum instruction that would-be teachers going through their masters in teaching program receive education on identifying bullying.

Teachers are busy individuals. They do their best, but in order to prevent needless injury and death, our best must get even better. We're frequently the first line of prevention in bullying. If a child comes to us or the parent of a child comes to us as teachers and tells us about the bullying, whether it's cyberbullying, which seems to be primarily the area that female students prefer, or whether it's knock-down physical abuse or name-calling, bullying has to be addressed, and funding for those programs must be in place in order to ensure that the bullying is ended. With the teachers who are currently teaching, as I say, we need in-service. In-service costs dollars.

A message that I've tried to put out through Children and Youth Services, that I put out last month at the Alberta Association of Services for Children and Families, is a simple message. It says: Safe Kids Save Dollars. If Bill 206 is going to have the effect that the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek has intended, then there have to be dollars following the bill. There have to be the educational components provided in order for bullying to end.

Right now schools have very few options. Quite often simply expelling the bully provides a holiday and a type of recognition for the bullying, but the bullying continues. Suspension isn't the answer either for the child being bullied or for the bullying. It just transfers the program. We need in-school efforts and support in a sustainable fashion if we are going to end bullying.

I compliment the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. Through her communities and crime task force she travelled the province, and she

heard from a variety of individuals, including myself at the University of Calgary and at another forum based in Calgary, about the need for funding for community resource officers. Those are police officers who spend time working with children in the schools. Currently, if a high school is sufficiently lucky, they'll have a resource officer attached to them. That support does not extend down to junior high schools on a regular basis, and it's extremely infrequent for school-based resource officers to be operating in elementary grades in elementary schools, where bullying often has begun.

In my own life I have been bullied. As a junior high school student in grade 8 in Richmond Hill, Ontario, I was the new kid on the block. My father was in the air force. We moved frequently, but I had never faced bullying before. I know what it feels like to be kicked and pounded and harassed and chased home. I don't want that to happen to any other Alberta children or any other children in this world for that matter. It had a profound effect on myself in terms of having to overcome the fears associated. Fortunately, between my parents and a teacher who was very concerned, I was taken under the individual's wing, and the bullying at least was reduced. It didn't end, but it was reduced, and I thank that teacher and my parents for having gone through that process.

As a teacher I vowed that there would never be bullying in my classrooms or, if I could prevent it, in the schools that I attended. I would hope that through Bill 206, School (Enhanced Protection of Students and Teachers) Amendment Act, 2009, the provision will be made to fund the necessary education programs for students, for teachers, and for parents that will make this bill a success.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, mover of the bill.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Jacobs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise today to speak to second reading of Bill 206, School (Enhanced Protection of Students and Teachers) Amendment Act, 2009. Our schools are facing challenges that are becoming increasingly more sophisticated. The safe learning environments that our schools strive to maintain are being threatened by bullying, violence, and drug use. By banning drug paraphernalia and providing novel disciplinary measures aimed at the prevention of major problems, Bill 206 provides substantial procedures in addressing these challenges.

Mr. Speaker, our school resource officers best understand these potential problems. These officers are regular uniformed police officers that work in our schools policing, protecting, and mentoring students. The officers act as counsellors, providing information to students about drugs and related topics and providing supports to students in need. Developing relationships with students allows them a greater awareness of what is going on in schools in terms of potentially threatening and illegal activities. These school resource officers are able to gain valuable knowledge that often leads to prevention of potentially dangerous situations. These officers are ideally placed and become a resource in terms of reporting some disconcerting trends within our schools.

3:30

Unfortunately, cases of bullying among students and incidents of drug use are increasingly seen in our schools. I believe this threatens our schools' safe learning environments. Bill 206 would outlaw the possession of drug paraphernalia on school property. Mr. Speaker, some pieces of drug paraphernalia used today could be sitting on your kitchen counter or coffee table, and you would not realize what they were. Many everyday objects are now, in fact, drug-related

equipment. Pop cans, bottles, pens, cutlery, paper folds, and portable scales could all be considered drug paraphernalia. For example, the screw cap of a broken light bulb is now commonly used in the process of making crystal meth. It is also considered dangerous because it could be used as a weapon. This is a perfect illustration of the potential linkage between drug paraphernalia and violence.

Our school resource officers deal with these cases on a daily basis. Currently possession of drug paraphernalia is not directly an indictable offence. Although drug paraphernalia can be used as evidence in the case of a trafficking charge, as I alluded to earlier, it is difficult to prove that a pop can, for example, is intended for drug use. This inability to effectively deal with the possession of drug paraphernalia has resulted in numerous serious and potentially deadly situations.

There was an incident last year which nearly resulted in the death of a student, a potential death that could have been prevented. In this incident a female student at a particular school was frequently found to be in possession of drug paraphernalia. She continued to possess the items even though she had been reportedly suspended. After returning to school, this girl coaxed another female classmate into smoking marijuana. The other girl had never been known as one to experiment with drugs. Soon after smoking the drug, the young classmate became gravely ill, and an ambulance was called. The girl who provided the drugs realized the urgency of the situation and admitted to the police and medical personnel what she had given to her female classmate. The drugs were, in fact, impure, and the girl nearly lost her life.

Mr. Speaker, I believe this illustrates how stronger disciplinary measures coupled with a ban on drug paraphernalia are necessary to intervene in situations such as this. It is concerning that a situation like this can develop in our schools, that even when someone has repeatedly been found to be in possession of drug paraphernalia, our school resource officers at present are not able to effectively address the situation and prevent future problems. I believe that the possession of drug paraphernalia is not only an obvious indication of drug use with a particular student; it can be an indication of a safety issue that affects the entire school. The role that drug paraphernalia plays in the overall drug culture is recognized in Bill 206.

This is a culture that threatens the safe learning environment that our schools work towards. Alberta students and school staff are better off without these objects in our schools, regardless of their intended use. If Bill 206 is implemented, resource officers and staff would have another tool to eliminate drug paraphernalia in schools. This ban may not solve all drug-related challenges, nor is it likely to solve all bullying-related challenges. However, the measures proposed in Bill 206 would provide a valuable tool that may help prevent many serious situations.

Mr. Speaker, before I conclude, I would like to speak personally of a tragic event that occurred in my constituency of Cardston-Taber-Warner. In the spring of 1999 a 14-year-old boy armed with a rifle walked on the grounds of W.R. Myers high school in the town of Taber. He opened fire and hit three people, taking the life of one of them. The loss of this life is an obvious tragedy, but so is the story of the boy shooter, who had been the victim of frequent bullying incidents throughout his youth and adolescence. At one point he was doused with lighter fluid and threatened to be lit on fire. It is sad that he had to become reclusive and extremely fearful and eventually dropped out of high school. This shooting took place only eight days after the Columbine high school shootings, where two boys aged 17 and 18, who were both repeatedly bullied, entered the school, killing one teacher and 12 students and injuring 21 other people.

These tragic incidents are a demonstration of the impact that bullying can have not only on an individual but on a community. Mr. Speaker, I believe that Bill 206 is a measure targeted at preventing these incidents. For these reasons, I endorse the intent and focus of this bill, and I believe that many Albertans would welcome its passage. I commend the member for bringing it forward.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms DeLong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today in this Assembly to speak in favour of Bill 206, the School (Enhanced Protection of Students and Teachers) Amendment Act, 2009, being put forward by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. Bill 206 would require everyone on school property to conduct themselves in a safe and peaceful manner in order to maintain the well-being of others. In addition, this bill would create a clear definition for bullying and provide mechanisms that would help ensure a safe learning environment at school.

Now, as MLAs we deal with high-conflict type issues, yet I doubt that anyone in this Legislature was actually physically endangered here on the way into the Legislature, nor were we physically bullied in any way today. That tends to be something that adults in our society can count on, that they can go about their business without being physically intimidated. Yet our kids, that we care about so much, are often in the situation in schools where they do not have that basic safety that we as adults have, so I do believe this is a very important bill.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 206 would provide students with support as they could be referred to educational measures programs, and because there is mandatory reporting in this bill, the actual problems will get dealt with. There will be various ways in which they can be dealt with, things including mental health, drug abuse, and anger management programs. These programs, which are alternatives to expulsion and suspension, would more effectively help youth by addressing their problems.

These educational measures programs are also used in other legislation. In fact, there's a similar provision under the youth criminal justice act where extrajudicial measures can be used. Extrajudicial measures mean measures other than the general judicial proceedings used to deal with a young person alleged to have committed a crime. They include referring the youth to a program or agency in the community once the youth consents or referring to an extrajudicial sanction, which is part of a program sanctioned by the Attorney General.

These extrajudicial measures provide support services to youth, which is similar to the intent of the educational measures program proposed in Bill 206. Mr. Speaker, if a student's behaviour is severe enough, Bill 206 would allow either the police officer and the principal or the courts to compel the student to participate in these educational measures programs, which are essentially rehabilitative programs. There's no single definition of what constitutes an educational measures program because these programs take into consideration the student's individual circumstances, and from there it would be decided what measures or support programs work best for that youth.

Every situation is unique. Therefore, these educational measures programs would be able to reflect that and effectively provide youth with the appropriate assistance. For example, Alberta Health Services provides several support services for individuals suffering from addictions, which could be considered an educational measures program.

3:40

Bill 206 is important. It ensures protection for the students who are being bullied, and it also provides support for the bullies, who may be acting out due to problems in their personal lives. Since these youth are our future, we need to have the tools to better address these problems early on so we do not perpetuate the cycle of violence and addictions. For this reason I support Bill 206, and I encourage all members to do so as well.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay, you wish to speak, right?

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour to rise today and speak to Bill 206, sponsored by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Our government is committed to promoting strong and vibrant communities where all Albertans feel safe. Bill 206 actively promotes this goal by targeting what some may consider the root cause of many forms of social violence, school bullying. Bill 206 proposes to extend the tools of educators and police officers, providing more ways to address schoolyard bullying more effectively. In addition, Bill 206 will require full documentation of all bullying incidents.

While these initiatives are well targeted, I feel the strength of this bill is how it addresses the evolution of bullying. When I think of bullying, I envision physical violence and playground name-calling. Seldom do I think of Internet chat rooms, text messaging, and e-mail. The sad reality is, however, that bullying has become well adapted to the information age. Mr. Speaker, this cyberbullying includes any form of bullying that uses an electronic medium. Using sites such as Facebook and MySpace, bullies engage in harmful behaviours such as spreading hurtful stories, engaging in name-calling, or even making personal threats on others' safety.

The Internet removes the human face from personal interactions. Individuals do not see the harm their words or actions inflict. Individuals who would otherwise be restrained from bullying can become empowered by their online anonymity. Technology shields bullies from the emotional harm they cause while offering no such protection to the victims. Adding to this shield of protection, cyberbullying also dramatically expands the scope of public ridicule. Simply put, online bullying exposes the victim to the criticisms of the cyberworld. Now, to be clear, Bill 206 does not attempt to control the entire cyberworld – that would be impossible – but it does ban bullying on all school computers and intranets.

While the methods of bullying may have a broader scope, the beginnings of bullying often remain the same, schoolyards. Mr. Speaker, Bill 206 will give teachers and police the tools to intervene more effectively in cases of bullying starting in the schoolyard. If cases of bullying can be identified and addressed at the schoolyard, it is hoped that cyberbullying might be stopped before it even begins.

Cyberbullying is only one example of how bullying has evolved in the information age. While the clicks of a mouse can spread hate and intolerance, they pale in comparison to the gut-wrenching shots of a gun. We only need look to the tragedies of Columbine, Virginia Tech, and Taber to find some reminders of why bullying, isolation, and hate cannot be tolerated in our schools. Bullying, acts of intimidation, and physical threats instill fear in the victims, and people who fear for their safety will take steps to protect themselves. Increasingly, this protection is taking form with the use of weapons. Weapons and weapon violence in schools are related to bullying, and

it's an issue that must be addressed. Mr. Speaker, Bill 206 is designed to help stop bullying before it escalates into violence involving weapons.

Victims of bullying need to feel as though there are effective solutions in place to justify coming to teachers for help. Current punishments such as detention, suspensions, and expulsions may not be effective enough in deterring the most hurtful forms of bullying. Under Bill 206 principals would be able to call police to meet with the students and their guardians. In severe cases, especially those that involve weapons, police officers would be given the power to impose court summonses on these offenders.

With these bans in place teachers and police officers not only would be able to seize the weapon but also would be given the power to confront the student more effectively. The earlier an authority figure can confront and intervene in a case of bullying, the greater the chance that the use of weapons can be avoided.

Bullying in schools is not a new phenomenon, but the methods of bullying have adapted themselves to the information age. Mr. Speaker, Bill 206 is an effective antibullying proposal because it clearly addresses these adaptations. Granting school administration and police officers new tools for establishing appropriate consequences for bullies allows them to intervene more effectively in cases of both cyberbullying and bullying involving weapons.

In closing, I would like to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for bringing forward this bill, and I would urge all members gathered here to support Bill 206. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Dr. Sherman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak today to Bill 206, the School (Enhanced Protection of Students and Teachers) Amendment Act, 2009, brought forward by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. Schooltime is a time to learn, grow, and dream about endless possibilities. Unfortunately, many young people go through a difficult time for various reasons, and one of those reasons is bullying.

Typically, what happens at a school playground is that for some reason somebody chooses to exploit somebody else. We can all remember back as children; I'm sure many of us in this Chamber experienced this ourselves first-hand. I personally remember I was bullied. I looked a little different from anybody else where I grew up. Walking home, you'd have to defend yourself against the bullies. Sometimes there would be two bullies, sometimes three. You'd take a different way home from school or to school. If you were in the playground, you couldn't do activities that you wanted to do because the bullies would intimidate you regularly.

Mr. Speaker, I'm really saddened that we're actually still having this conversation here today. Thirty-five years have passed. This isn't a conversation we ought to have. This kind of stuff shouldn't be happening.

Bullies can take the fun out of school, where bullying happens the most, and turn most simple things like a ride on the bus or a stop at a locker or a walk to the bathroom into a scary event that's anticipated with worry all day long. School is a place where children go to learn. They go to read, not to worry about whether they're going to be safe.

Children who are bullied often experience low self-esteem, depression, whereas those doing the bullying may go on to engage in more destructive antisocial behaviour as teens and adults. Bullies, who often have been bullied themselves, may pick on others to feel powerful, popular, important, or in control. Often they antagonize

the same children repeatedly. It's just easy to pick on that same person all the time.

Sadly, bullying is widespread, Mr. Speaker. According to a U.S. poll in 2004 86 per cent of 9- to 13-year-old boys and girls polled said they'd seen somebody else being bullied, 48 per cent said they had been bullied, and 42 per cent admitted to bullying other kids at least once in a while. Boys were more likely than girls to say that they would fight back, whereas girls were more likely than boys to say they would talk to an adult.

If a school is rife with bullying, it simply doesn't feel safe. It poisons the social environment for everyone and has long-term consequences not only for the victim but also for the bully. Bullying is a social relationship where an individual repeatedly picks a conflict with another individual. It can be verbal, physical, psychological. Perpetrators are equally likely to be boys or girls and to be physically or emotionally or verbally aggressive and now with the Internet, through cyberspace. Extortion, intimidation, and destruction of property are all parts of this behaviour pattern. Although black eyes or broken limbs are a concrete sign that your child may be a victim of bullying, there are many other different ways and different signs that children have that may not show a bruise.

Bullying, Mr. Speaker, affects the whole community. As they grow up, playground bullies may transfer their abuse to other forms of harassment or violence and become workplace bullies. Boys who were bullies in elementary school are more likely to have criminal convictions by the time they're in their 20s. This is not surprising given that many bullying activities are offences under the Criminal Code if they were done by adults.

Victims, on the other hand, typically suffer withdrawal and anxiety, their school performance may drop, and they may try to avoid going to school altogether. In rare cases they lash out in revenge, endangering the entire school.

3:50

Hear no evil; see no evil. Mr. Speaker, most children know when there's bullying, but they don't report it because they don't believe anything is going to get done. In fact, they believe that bullying is going to get worse because that's what happens: problems tend to fester under the surface.

A study of Toronto schools found that a bullying act occurred every seven seconds, but teachers were aware of only 4 per cent of the incidents. Seven out of 10 teachers but only 1 in 4 students say that the teacher almost always intervened. Close to 40 per cent of the victims say that they have not talked to their parents about the problem. Ninety per cent of children say that they find it unpleasant to watch bullying. Peers are present in 85 per cent of bullying episodes on the playground and in the classroom.

Now, why do kids bully? There are many reasons that they become bullies. Bullies frequently target people who are different. They seek to exploit those differences. They choose victims who they think are unlikely to retaliate. Bullies may also turn to abusive behaviour as ways of dealing with a difficult situation in their own home. Mr. Speaker, hurting people hurt people. Bullies might not realize how hurtful their actions can be, but some know the pain first-hand because they've been bullied. Some bullies think their behaviour is normal because they come from families in which everyone regularly gets angry and shouts or calls names and has physical altercations. They copy what they know, and just like the children they're tormenting, bullies themselves often have low self-esteem.

Victims are too fearful to ask an adult to intervene, but they can start by asking for help. Mr. Speaker, this is why we're here today. The objective of Bill 206 is to promote and improve the safety of our

schools for our children as well as for school staff by providing a legislated definition of bullying in the School Act along with a ban on bullying on school property. In addition, Bill 206 would prohibit the possession of drug paraphernalia or any tool or device that could potentially harm our children. Within this legislation all schools will be required to document incidents that involve bullying, possession of any drug paraphernalia, and tools or devices that can be injurious to the well-being of others.

No parent wants their children to experience the degrading realities of bullying. Many students – our children, our future – believe that there is little that they or anyone else can do to stop a bully. As a society we have to do away with the notion that bullying is an acceptable part of growing up. There have been a number of well-documented cases that you've heard today where the victims of bullying have violently retaliated, and some have taken their own life as a result.

The strength of Bill 206 is that it gives police the discretion to lay a mandatory court summons for severe cases of bullying, possession of any drug paraphernalia or tools or devices that can be injurious to the physical or mental well-being of others. While we have programs in our schools and in our communities that target bullying such as those that prevent family violence or the presence of school counsellors and school resource officers, it would seem that something more is needed. Mr. Speaker, Bill 206 seeks to provide schools with the additional tools they need to deal with bullying more effectively by prohibiting these dangerous items.

Bill 206 provides schools with the ability to do more and to more easily identify and address dangerous situations, and by providing the option – the option – of involving law enforcement in severe case and allowing disciplinary measures such as a court summons or community service, I believe that Bill 206 will go a long way in changing the prevalence and effects of bullying.

Mr. Speaker, it's for these reasons that I will be supporting Bill 206, and I look forward to hearing from the rest of the Assembly. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and join the debate on Bill 206, the School (Enhanced Protection of Students and Teachers) Amendment Act, 2009. I'd like to thank the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for bringing forward this bill.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 206 is an important piece of legislation. If passed, not only will it help protect victims of bullying, but it will also provide support for bullies themselves. Bill 206 requires an amendment to the School Act providing options or tools to teachers and other officials for effective management of incidents of bullying, violence, threatening conduct, possession of unsafe tools or devices as well as drug paraphernalia. Additionally, Bill 206 addresses the new phenomenon of online bullying.

Mr. Speaker, bullying is an age-old problem that in recent years has become more pervasive with outcomes that are far too often tragic. The impact of bullying can be profound. It can wear down the confidence of the victim and lead to consequences such as suicide and murder. Not only does bullying impact the victim but the bully as well. They learn that this type of behaviour is effective and acceptable, which can lead to carrying these attitudes with them for life. Bill 206 will provide teachers, principals, and school resource officers the tools to effectively identify bullies and assertively address this problem.

Currently suspensions and expulsions are the norm for dealing with cases of bullying. However, this is not likely to address the root cause. When a child is sent home on a suspension or expulsion,

often a parent is not there to supervise. They may be working or are unable to effectively parent due to problems that they themselves may have. In addition, while at home on a suspension or expulsion a child will have greater access to television, movies, and video games which, more often than not, can teach aggression as an acceptable form of problem solving, thereby aggravating the issue.

Furthermore, bullying is not limited to a school setting. All too often bullying starts in schools and continues in the community, thus creating greater social and criminal issues. If a child has no one to supervise them, they may begin to hang out or gravitate to those in the community that have also been expelled and, potentially, others that may have addiction and behavioural problems. By keeping children in school, as Bill 206 would do, these students are more likely to receive education and support. Further, being at school, where a peaceable environment is promoted, will help to teach acceptable behaviour, especially in comparison to walking the streets in our communities. Students are not required to participate in any remedial activity during the time away from school; therefore, the causes for their suspension or expulsion are not being addressed.

Mr. Speaker, catching and addressing these unacceptable behaviours early is key to students learning right from wrong and, therefore, aiding in becoming successful adults. Altogether, this is important in the promotion and maintenance of safe communities. Bill 206 gives schools resources to help children before bullying becomes a lifelong problem and results in even more serious or severe consequences. Those that cause problems in schools will often turn to a life of crime, drugs, and gangs, and these have immense impact on communities.

It has been shown that targeted strategies are needed to ensure appropriate intervention, protection, and follow-up support for those individuals involved, which includes both the bully and the victim. Bill 206 would be another tool to help break the cycle of violence, complementing our other initiatives. For example, Alberta Education offers effective behaviour supportive training, or EBS, to teachers across the province. EBS is an effective tool that includes helping teachers build a list of school-wide expectations that are directly taught and consistently reinforced throughout the school by all adults. In addition, it aids in the direct teaching of social skills and positive behaviours that specifically demonstrate what behaviour expectations look like in each setting or context. Bill 206 will work in combination with these strategies. Additionally, Bill 206 can work in conjunction with mental health programs and alcohol and drug abuse programs, allowing the child to receive the help that they need. Mr. Speaker, a child is not likely to have access to these resources if they are not at school.

Mr. Speaker, in 2003 this government recognized that bullying was becoming a concern that needed to be addressed. As a result, the Alberta Roundtable on Family Violence and Bullying was created. The Alberta Roundtable on Family Violence and Bullying, which presented its final report in 2004, emphasized the importance of early childhood development and school-age strategies for managing aggressive bullying behaviours. These strategies can prove to be society's best chance to effect positive change and address behaviours that perpetuate family violence and bullying across generations.

4:00

The consultations that occurred across the province led to a provincial bullying prevention initiative. The bullying prevention initiative through the joint efforts of Alberta Education and Alberta children's services comprises three websites that have been developed to help children, youth, and adults learn about bullying and how to deal with bullying issues. Bill 206 can work to complement this bullying prevention initiative.

Mr. Speaker, the ultimate goal of Bill 206 is to identify the problem and work at addressing it. Bill 206 can help end the cycle of bullying and stop this kind of behaviour in future generations, ultimately helping all entities involved, from the victim to the school administration to the community.

Mr. Speaker, I fully support Bill 206 and urge all other members to do the same. Thank you.

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

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise for the first time in this session to speak in favour of Bill 206, the School (Enhanced Protection of Students and Teachers) Amendment Act, 2009. I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for introducing this bill, which I fully support.

This piece of legislation seeks to ensure that Alberta's youth are able to grow and prosper in our world-renowned education system. It would provide legislative direction that would require all persons on school property to conduct themselves in a safe and responsible manner. It would apply to all school property such as school buses, the Internet, and educational intranets. Further, this bill would also ban drug paraphernalia and any tools or devices that could cause harm to others on school property. This bill would help to ensure that an individual's activities do not negatively affect the physical or mental well-being of those around them. All together, this would help reduce and eliminate one of the most detrimental activities within our school system: bullying.

One of the strengths of Bill 206 is in the creation of a legal definition of bullying which seeks to identify the many forms of bullying experienced by Alberta's youth. Now, Mr. Speaker, the proposed definition would explicitly include harassment towards individuals based on sexual orientation and physical disabilities. By creating this legal definition of bullying, school officials and our legal system will be given the tools necessary to continue to provide the safe learning environment that our youth require.

However, Mr. Speaker, by simply defining the activities that are considered to be part of bullying, we must make certain that our schools can effectively address these situations. Many Alberta youth experience the effects of bullying on an ongoing basis and may feel as though they have no effective recourse to end their unfortunate circumstances. This can be attributed to a number of reasons such as fear of reprisal or fear of harassment or the common belief that bullying is simply a part of growing up. It's not. These unfortunate situations may cause bullying victims to internalize their anger and discontent for their current situation, which can severely limit their academic or personal growth.

Mr. Speaker, our society has come a long way in recognizing the negative and long-lasting effects of bullying. More importantly, we have conclusively established that bullying is not simply a part of growing up. We only have to look at the tragedies of Columbine and Taber back in 1999 to identify the potential consequences of not effectively addressing bullying in schools.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 206 gives our youth and school officials the necessary resources to recognize and address bullying, and even more importantly it removes the onus from the victim of identifying and remedying the situations of bullying. The fear of further bullying or being deemed a so-called tattletale by the broader student body may prevent those being bullied from coming forward and filing a complaint themselves. This can embolden bullies and result in more victims within our schools. These injurious activities can severely damage our children's self-confidence and may prevent them from achieving their full potential not just in their childhood but in later life.

Given this, Bill 206 provides a very effective provision which allows schools to become a complainant against a bully rather than simply having the victim initiate a complaint against an offending individual. For example, Mr. Speaker, if a resource officer were to see a student being bullied by other students, the officer would be able to initiate the complaint process against the offending students. This would provide students, bullied or otherwise, with the peace of mind that those working within the school system will be cognizant of bullies and have been given the necessary tools to address the circumstances. At the end of the day, this will reduce the students' fears of reprisal or intensified bullying as they do not have to be the ones that bring forward a complaint. This is not to say that those who suffer from bullying should not or cannot report the activities to appropriate authorities; however, this recognizes that there are many players in the ongoing struggle to end this problem and that school officials can play an important role in helping to end the torment of bullying.

Mr. Speaker, there are members of this Assembly who have experienced or witnessed the effects of bullying while attending school. I was moved earlier by the speech from the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. I also recall the time when my mother, who was a teacher, came home from her grade 6 class, came to me in university and told me that she was attacked and bullied by a student. This is simply not acceptable in a civil society. These people, though, have witnessed the negative consequences of such actions, such as the pressures those being bullied may face when they look for ways to end their anguish.

Mr. Speaker, this provision will help alleviate victims from concerns of reprisal by allowing schools to become the complainant. For this reason I fully support Bill 206, and I want to say thank you again to the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for bringing forward this important initiative.

Thank you.

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

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and join the debate on Bill 206, the School (Enhanced Protection of Students and Teachers) Amendment Act, 2009. This bill was brought forward by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, and I would like to take this time to thank her for this noble piece of legislation.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 206 proposes that a number of amendments be made to the School Act to help address the serious issue of bullying in our schools. Bullying is an affront to our shared values of tolerance and acceptance and cannot be tolerated. Bill 206 confronts this contentious issue head-on and proposes decisive measures that I feel will effectively sideline the future of bullying in our classrooms.

While I've heard praise for specific measures proposed in this legislation, I would like to address how Bill 206 in its entirety would work to keep children and youth out of the court system. Mr. Speaker, there is no doubt that bullying can be a criminal offence. Harassment and verbal abuse can impart long-lasting emotional scars that in far too many cases have led to violence or suicide. Similarly, physical violence and assault generate fear and hostility. These are the trademark symptoms of bullying and are clearly illegal under the Criminal Code. While many of these cases would be prosecuted in youth court, in serious cases of bullying often the last resort is a court hearing and a criminal prosecution. Court cases for bullying in schools can be treated in the same manner as an assault or a harassment case and in convictions can lead to serious penalties like prison time, probation, or restraining orders. It is important to state

that these punishments are necessary, particularly for severe cases of bullying, and in no way will Bill 206 contravene these measures.

What Bill 206 will do, however, is create a system that will help address and resolve cases of bullying before they escalate to a court summons. With the measures proposed by this particular bill, school principals and their administration would be able to call meetings with parents, the student, and resource officers, as examples, if the offence merits it. This meeting would enable resource officers to become involved early in the cases of bullying and potentially prevent them from escalating to cases that end up in a court of law. Having resource officers attend meetings gives added weight to the conversation. Bullies would know that not only were their actions severe but that perpetuating those actions could lead to serious criminal charges.

Perhaps, Mr. Speaker, most deterring: criminal charges can lead to criminal records. A criminal record is a serious document, that can follow a person for the rest of their lives. It can prevent them from finding employment and travelling abroad as well as dramatically affect people's perceptions of that individual. Bill 206 will complement local operational school systems that will help keep children away from the court system and serious consequences.

4:10

To be clear, Mr. Speaker, Bill 206 is not removing the potential for a court hearing and a criminal record for bullies; instead, it is creating a system that addresses bullying before it reaches this level of seriousness. In fact, if it is merited, the resource officers and the principal and others involved can refer the student to court, but in these circumstances the student would be tried under the School Act as opposed to the Criminal Code. This provides yet another mechanism for officials at the local level to address bullying without fearing that the student will acquire a permanent record.

That is perhaps why I am most supportive of Bill 206. On one hand, it offers clear protection to the victims of bullying, giving them the comfort of knowing that a resource officer is able to intervene on their behalf. On the other hand, Bill 206 recognizes that being a bully often happens in the formative years of a person's life and that imposing severe punishments on children and youth at early ages could essentially destroy their lives. After all, in many cases bullies are themselves victims of household abuse or neglect or other circumstances. Rather than simply imposing a mandatory court summons for all the cases of bullying, Bill 206 gives officials the discretion to choose whether or not to require a court hearing. This gives flexibility to the system. For example, it is possible that a case of serious bullying could be dealt with more effectively through communication or support programming rather than prison terms and probation.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 206 recognizes that bullying is a serious offence that has the potential to destroy lives, but to the credit of the hon. member this bill also recognizes that a criminal record has the same potential. Rather than simply legislating serious consequences for bullying, Bill 206 creates a balance wherein victims are protected from their aggressors and aggressors are protected from themselves.

In closing, I applaud the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for bringing forward Bill 206. I truly believe that this legislation extends protection not only to the victims of bullying but to the bullies themselves. I stand in support of Bill 206 and urge all members of the Legislature to join me.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, you indicated to me that you wished to speak on the bill.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to speak on Bill 206, brought forward by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. The intent of the bill is to enhance the safety of students and teachers by amending the School Act to include explicit sections on banned items and bullying. I'm sure that even the majority of us, too, experienced bullying at one time or another. When I went to school, I was the victim of bullying, too. The only way I could escape bullying was because I was a shining student in my school, and the bullies always wanted some favours from me, needing help in their math or in English or social studies, so that's how I was spared. I'm sure, you know, like I said, we all experienced bullying at one point or another. Bullying goes on in the workplace, too.

This bill is almost a repeat of Bill 210 from last session. It defines bully, banned items. It meets lots of our earlier concerns regarding the exclusion of sexual orientation and disability in the definition of bully. It also states the procedure that teachers and principals must follow if the student is suspected of possessing a banned item – enough has been said about drug paraphernalia and all the other items – or bullying another student. The principal in collaboration with a peace officer can determine an educational measures program for the student to participate in.

That's where I have a concern, too, about the educational measures program. The principal must also advise the board of placing students in an educational measures program, and the board must advise the minister of any contravention regarding the banned items or bullying. The school board also has the responsibility to ensure that there are educational measures programs. Although the bill has been improved because of the definition of bullying and includes a number of discriminated groups that earlier versions did not, there are still some worries about the actual mechanics of how the students would be punished. Although the definition of bullying is more inclusive than prior to the last session, children do not have to have a reason to bully.

I think we should amend the bill to strike out section 5. There are two main problems with section 5. First, it seems to contradict legislation in the School Act, and second, it erodes the powers currently held by the principal to suspend students guilty of bullying or of possessing banned items.

We also need some clarification as to what educational measures programs are and what will be involved in instituting them. Where is the funding going to come from? In light of the big deficit I think we have to look at the funding for those programs as well. What exactly is an educational measures program, and are these programs already in place? For the school boards that don't currently have these programs in place, where is the funding going to come from? Again, that's the question that arises time and again. Do these programs have to be expanded if this legislation passes?

Section 5 amends section 24, which states the conditions under which a student can be suspended. It states that with the exception of the contravention of banned items or bullying, a student can be suspended if they do not comply with section 12 or has failed to participate in an educational measures program or has caused injury, mental or physical, to others in school.

This section is attempting to ensure that a student that is found guilty of a banned item or bullying will take an educational measures program. Only if the student fails to participate in the program will the student be suspended. I have concern with this section. A student may be found guilty of bullying, be required to enrol in an educational measures program, and shall not be suspended, all the while being guilty under section 12(f), which is failing to respect the rights of others as well. If the student is guilty of contravening section 12(f), then there's reason to suspend the student. On one hand, the bully should participate in the educational measures

program and should not be suspended but should be suspended considering causing an injury. This would make the proposed legislation contradict existing legislation and would create a legitimate basis for appeals.

Currently the principal can suspend those who have been found guilty of bullying or possessing banned items. This amendment states that if a student is guilty of bullying or possessing banned items, the principal cannot suspend the student or should make the student participate in an educational measures program. As a result, this amendment would create greater restrictions on the available courses of action to principals.

I suggest taking a serious look at section 5. The consequences would be that the mechanism of placing a student in an educational measures program before suspending the student would be deleted. It would also result in resolving contradiction and continue to allow principals to choose whether a student should participate in an educational measures program or be suspended outright.

Those are my concerns. Otherwise, I support this bill. Thank you.

4:20

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, you have up to five minutes to close the debate.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to close debate on Bill 206. I want to thank all of my colleagues; my researcher, Elizabeth Clement; my assistant, Brock Mulligan; police; school resource officers; kids; parents; and a special thanks to one mom who shared her heartfelt, sad story with me, which I mentioned when I started the debate. Thank you, Betty.

As I said before, this bill is going to make our schools safer. It's going to prohibit acts of intimidation, which, I may add, Mr. Speaker, includes hazing, and bullying which is disseminated by electronic media on and off the school grounds. Additionally, it would prohibit the possession of weapons and/or drug paraphernalia. All of these issues detract from safety in our schools and hurt many young people and teachers in our province.

Mr. Speaker, I look forward to the committee stage of the debate and ask all members to support second reading.

[Motion carried; Bill 206 read a second time]

The Deputy Speaker: Before the next item, I would ask for unanimous consent for Introduction of Guests.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests (reversion)

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To my colleagues in the Legislature, I am delighted to be joined by three individuals, constituents all, from the fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre who have been very helpful in advising and guiding me and certainly in making their concerns and issues known about the upcoming Bill 208. In fact, I managed to facilitate a meeting between the mover of the bill and some of my constituents, for which I thank the member. I would ask the following individuals to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly: Dave Farquharson, who lives in the Lions Village life lease; Ornal Jorgenson; and I think Mrs. Francis Reid is also here today. Please welcome these individuals to the Assembly.

Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

(continued)

Bill 208

Life Leases Act

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mittel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to stand today and open second reading debate on Bill 208, the Life Leases Act. The objective of Bill 208 is to create a legislative framework for life-lease living accommodations within the province. Essentially, the Life Leases Act would function in much the same way as our condominium act or our Residential Tenancies Act. Bill 208's framework would address issues related to safety deposits, entrance fees, dispute resolution, security of occupancy as well as disclosure requirements.

Mr. Speaker, life leases are arrangements whereby a tenant is granted the exclusive right to occupy a dwelling for the remainder of their life. To be clear, the occupant does not own the property, as in the case of condominiums, nor do they rent, as in the case of traditional apartments. Furthermore, perhaps because of this unusual arrangement, there is currently no legislation regulating life leases in Alberta. A legislative framework would provide a sense of security for the occupants of these living arrangements, and knowing that life leases are regulated by the government may in turn make life-lease accommodations more attractive to potential tenants.

This accommodation is basically tailored for seniors. Alberta's population is aging, and over 25 per cent of our population will be seniors by 2020. Bill 208 will provide this framework by requiring four broad sections within all life-lease arrangements.

First, this bill would guarantee the right of leasers to have input within their life-lease community as well as guarantee a level of control over the operation of their residence. Essentially, this would function much in the same way as a condo board does in a condominium.

Second, Bill 208 would define requirements surrounding the concept of entrance fees. Mr. Speaker, an entrance fee would be defined as a substantial portion of the total occupancy cost paid in advance. Simply put, an entrance fee is the mortgage of a life lease paid up front. In addition, the Life Leases Act would require that this entrance fee is to be completely returned to a potential tenant if the tenant withdraws from the lease before it is accepted by the landlord. Furthermore, Bill 208 would stipulate that when a tenant terminates their life lease, no less than 95 per cent of the entrance fee must be returned to them.

The third main section of this bill deals with the occupancy and possession dates. For example, this bill would stipulate that tenants would have a three-day cooling-off period in which they could change their minds about their life lease and then get all of their money back. This cooling-off period is intended to give tenants the chance to reflect on their life-lease agreement and to make sure that it meets all of their needs.

Mr. Speaker, I believe there should be complete transparency regarding these contracts because, after all, these life leases will be addressing their future, and as seniors there needs to be an absolute assurance of the security of their investment. The last thing any senior would want to worry about in contemplating their future living arrangements is whether or not it's a risky proposition.

The final section addressed in this bill deals with the upkeep and maintenance of the life-lease complex. It would be stipulated that the landlord would be responsible for the upkeep and maintenance

of the building and that major repairs should be funded out of a reserve fund.

Mr. Speaker, the end result of these four sections would be the creation of a framework supporting life-lease development. After all, I believe that life leases will eventually play a large role in meeting Alberta's future housing needs. For example, various forms of life leases have already become a viable and popular option for many Alberta seniors. This is not surprising. Life leases are an attractive option for fixed-income households for a variety of reasons.

First, they're affordable. In fact, the majority of life-lease complexes are owned by nonprofit organizations. These organizations often develop life-lease complexes in order to provide affordable housing options to fixed-income seniors, and as a result of this, life leases are relatively affordable when compared to condominiums or traditional homes. The lease arrangement also assures an equity position with regard to their savings rather than renting, which would gradually deplete their savings.

A second characteristic of life leases that would make them attractive to seniors is the various support services that they may offer. Mr. Speaker, many life-lease communities offer options such as housekeeping, laundry, and even cooking services to their tenants. These services are great for seniors who wish to remain independent in their own homes but also would like assistance with day-to-day chores. The goal is to respect the clients and to be able to respond to their needs with dignity, kindness, and compassion. Essentially, life leases allow seniors to age in their own homes. It is a safe and secure home environment.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, life leases are an attractive option for Alberta seniors because of their communal nature. Most life-lease complexes provide communal gathering areas and recreational facilities, depending on the individual lifestyles and personal preferences. These can range from swimming pools to billiard rooms to banquet halls to bars. A senior living in one of these communities would not only have access to these facilities but would also be welcomed into a community.

4:30

Mr. Speaker, ensuring that seniors have choice regarding where they live is a cornerstone of this government's health care plan. Legislating a framework for life leases would essentially create more options. More options, in turn, mean more choice. I feel that Bill 208 is timely, effective, and fair to both life-lease landlords and tenants. I believe that Bill 208 has the potential to make life leases an attractive living option within our province.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will conclude my comments and look forward to the rest of the debate. Thank you.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and my compliments to the mover of the bill. This is a much-needed piece of legislation in this province. Frankly, I was working on my own version, so I'm very grateful that the member has saved me a lot of hard work.

Now, I'm going to talk about some of the things that we would like to see included or adjusted in the proposed legislation that the member has put before us. Don't misunderstand me; that's not to say that this isn't overall a pretty good bill and a pretty good stab at it. As was mentioned, life lease is a great option, particularly for seniors. Using money that they may well have accumulated in their family home, that money, because of the way this particular housing option is organized, allows them to often get a much more well-

appointed or a larger unit in a very nice facility. Essentially, the developer is able to save on borrowing costs by using the entrance fee; therefore, that money saved can be redirected into, frankly, a much nicer place to live.

I am very fortunate in having one of the three life-lease units in Edmonton in my fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre. The two other ones in Edmonton are in Riverside and Castle Downs. I think mine is actually the longest one; that's Lions Village Raintown, just over on 109th Street here. So I've had to learn a lot about life leases over the years. The biggest problem is we had no governing legislation, so I think this is a really great piece of legislation brought in front of us.

Having said all that to put it in context, there are a couple of issues that my constituents who are joining us in the gallery today have brought forward to me – and I think I added on one of my own here – and feel is of importance. We'd like to see them included in amendments to the bill as we move forward with this. Very quickly, the list is: a preamble, the retroactivity of the bill, audits, the trustee sections, the Canada revenue act, and, if we have time, the use of excess funds.

I think it would be helpful if we had a preamble to the bill that recognized that the overriding principle of a life-lease act was to protect the consumer. I think there is a fair amount of protection, and indeed this whole housing option makes it very attractive to developers. Frankly, I'm not worried about the developers here. I'm worried about the human beings that are going to live in this and to make sure that in a preamble we would be able to shape the legislation by saying that this is primarily for consumer protection. We would like to see a preamble added to the bill that laid that out as an overriding principle.

One of the things that we're noticing is that when we develop this legislation – and I'll refer back to the condo act, which is the one we have in front of us – we're really good about laying out how we start these and all the nitty-gritty about who is responsible for which piece and how we divide it all up to begin with. Well, what we didn't anticipate in the bill – and I'm hoping that we can overcome that problem in this piece of legislation – is: do we design a piece of legislation that works for us 30 years down the road? That's the situation we now have with condominiums. For anybody representing the larger cities we have – or just about any riding now has condominiums in it – the condominium act that we have does not anticipate what it's like living in that building 30 or 40 years down the road. So I'm trying to make sure that we don't make that same mistake with this legislation.

Second, and I would say from my constituents' point of view the largest area of concern, is the way the bill is written. This appears in section 2(1). For those of you following along, it appears on page 3 of the actual bill. It does not capture those that are already in units. It only goes forward. Frankly, that's not uncommon, but I think we need to revisit that decision.

What we have is: "every unit that is the subject of a life lease and every residential complex that contains such a unit, where the life lease is entered into after this Act comes into force." We would advocate that that last subsection, "where the life lease is entered into after this Act comes into force," is deleted. Now, I'm committing myself, but if I can't get the member to do it, I may bring forward an amendment when we're in Committee of the Whole that would delete that section because then it would capture those that are already living in life leases. As I said, you know, there are already three of them in Edmonton, there are probably at least that many in Calgary, and there may well be others in places like Medicine Hat or Red Deer or Lethbridge, et cetera, et cetera.

The problem that we run into, of course, is that there is a certain amount of turnover that we have. In checking with my constituents, they were saying: yeah, it's about 10 per cent. You know, people move on; they go into long-term care; they may pass away. There's about a 10 per cent turnover. If we did that, for example, in Lions Village Railtown, we'd end up with about six people a year who would come in after the act took effect, but everybody else in the unit would not be covered by the act. So increasingly we have disproportion as to who the act applies to, and I think it's important that we anticipate that problem and deal with it. We need to have some sort of retroactivity or a phase-in where we capture the people who are already in life leases.

I mean, let's not kid ourselves. This is, I would say, the most vigorous kind of living situation that seniors are choosing in this day and age. Although it's a building designed for seniors, it really is independent living. These are very, very vigorous, active people who are living there, so we're going to end up with them in these units for a very long period of time, another 20 years or 30 years potentially. We just don't want to see that kind of disproportion on who's covered by the act and who isn't, so we need to address that.

Holy mackerel. I've got two minutes left.

The next issue that was of real concern was the audits. We need clarity in the act around the audits. In particular, we need an independent auditor. There has to be a clear separation in audit statements between various buildings that are owned by the same organization, whether that's private or not-for-profit, and the information has to be made available to the leaseholders. Right now there is no current requirement for reliable, consistent annual financial reports to be given to the leaseholders. And we need to sort out the problem of an audit versus a review. I don't want to see smaller buildings take an unfair financial hit to produce an audited statement; nonetheless, the people that are leaseholders deserve to know what's happening with their money and how it's being handled. So we do need monitoring.

We need a criteria, a method that this is going to be done by; we need enforcement – for example, a fine system if these statements aren't made available – and adequate penalties, perhaps on a sliding scale; and we need to address the issue that the majority vote can remove the requirement to produce an audited report. That can come around through various kinds of coercion or a landlord telling people it isn't necessary. I think the review has to be there, and it cannot be waived for any reason.

The fourth area is around a trustee, and that's covering sections 19 to 23 in the act. My question is: why does the act view the trust money as the landlord's money and not the tenant's money? There are some issues that have been raised by my constituents around who is determining the trustee. It needs to be a professional designation, and it needs to be more clearly laid out than what we have currently in the legislation. It could go under the section 1(1)(p), that description of a trustee, but I think that it needs to be someone with an actual professional designation, something more along the lines of what we're seeing in section 22(1)(b). So who determines this and the fact that it should be a professional.

4:40

The trustee should also be mutually acceptable and independent, and the communication must be freely given, and access to the trustee must also be freely available. I think there are a number of court cases before us right now that run counter to that.

Thank you for the opportunity. I didn't get through my list, but I will in Committee of the Whole. Thank you.

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

Mr. Weadick: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure today to rise and speak to Bill 208, the Life Leases Act. I'd like to commend the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat for bringing forward this very timely and pragmatic piece of legislation. Bill 208 recognizes and addresses important issues which affect one of our province's most valuable demographics, our seniors.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 208 would address specific concerns regarding seniors' housing by providing legislative direction for senior citizens living in life-lease units. The bill also provides individuals interested in life leases with peace of mind, knowing that life leases are protected by legislation. The life-lease concept is fairly new in Alberta, and there is currently little legislation that regulates life-lease complexes. However, there are life-lease facilities currently operating within the province and within Lethbridge.

Mr. Speaker, it is important to understand the concept of a life lease before one can discuss the need for legislation. One example of a life lease currently operating in our province is Martha's House located in Lethbridge. It's operated by St. Michael's health, and it's a member of Covenant Health of Alberta. Martha's House affords lessees with the benefits of life-long tenure within the life-lease complex with the payment of an entrance fee while also providing a variety of extended care services. Lethbridge's Martha's House serves as an example of an effective and valuable life-lease property. However, the nature of life leases prompts questions surrounding how Bill 208 would apply to existing life-lease tenants and landlords.

Examples of care options at Martha's House include the rights for lessees to choose optional meal services, on-call doctors, and other personal care services are available. Mr. Speaker, life-lease facilities such as Martha's House provide lessees with varying degrees of care and the opportunity to be part of a stable community. Martha's House provides an example of the benefits that a life lease has to offer our senior citizens.

Bill 208 will not change the daily operations of our provincial life leases; rather, it will further protect the investment that Alberta's senior citizens have made in their life-lease properties while also creating confidence for property owners that they, too, are protected by legislation.

Mr. Speaker, a prospective tenant must know the financial obligations going into a life lease and as well once it is terminated under any and all circumstances. Bill 208 will require this information be granted by the landlord to the prospective lessee so that they can make informed decisions regarding their future. Under Bill 208 any change in completion or possession must be disclosed to the prospective tenant.

Bill 208 would also permit potential tenants who express interest in a life lease to place a deposit, known as a prelease payment, on a particular unit. This payment would ensure their right to provide the landlord with the appropriate entrance fee, effectively solidifying their tenancy in that life lease. Bill 208 will require these prelease payments to be held in trust, to be either added to the entrance fee upon tenancy or refunded to the individual if they decide not to enter the life lease. This would ensure that a lessee's prelease payment to an existing life-lease complex will be secure. I do not mean to imply that currently prelease payments are being withheld, but to encourage confidence in the security of investing in these type of complexes, Bill 208 addresses the rules around prelease payments.

Mr. Speaker, solidifying a long-term living arrangement is an important decision for our Alberta senior citizens. Where prelease payments are received to place a hold on a life-lease unit, the payment of an entrance fee grants a lessee entry to the life-lease complex. The entrance fee paid to the landlord provides seniors with secured tenancy and in some cases the access to care facilities.

Given the significance of a senior's decision to enter into a life lease, Bill 208 provides a three-day cooling-off period to the prospective tenants during which the lessee can cancel their life lease and receive a full refund of their entrance fee. Any withdrawal of the offer to lease prior to the landlord's acceptance would also require the entrance fee to be repaid in full to the prospective tenant within 14 days of withdrawal. Mr. Speaker, this allows our Alberta senior citizens adequate time for reflection and careful consideration regarding their future in a life-lease facility.

Upon entry into the life lease the entrance fee must be responsibly managed in order to ensure that the full amount is available to be refunded to the lessee at the end of their tenancy. Bill 208 would require the landlord of current life-lease properties to now hold the lessee's entrance fee in trust for the duration of their tenancy, using any interest accrued to provide upgrades or additional services to the life lease. What this allows, Mr. Speaker, is both the security of the lessee's entrance fee and maintained or improved life-lease facilities.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 208 establishes the rights of lessees in securing entry into a life lease while also providing new rights to tenants after they have established residencies in the life lease. Alberta's seniors deserve the right to be informed and involved in their life leases. These are their homes. Bill 208 would establish these rights by requiring landlords of an existing life-lease complex to hold annual meetings with lessees and disclose financial statements to ensure that tenants are well informed regarding the fiscal status of their life lease. During these meetings lessees are also encouraged to voice any concerns regarding the operation of the life-lease complex. Bill 208 will ensure that Alberta seniors have the opportunity to be actively included in the operation of their life-lease complex. This is their home, and we must never forget that.

On certain occasions a life-lease community may be subjected to a mortgage sale, a tax sale, or a foreclosure order which would change the landlord. In each of these scenarios it is crucial that the lessees are given an appropriate amount of time to address their options. First and foremost, Mr. Speaker, it is imperative to note that Bill 208 requires that each lessee will receive a full refund of their entrance fee. Following a change in landlord, lessees have the right to remain in their unit till the end of the month. In addition, Bill 208 would provide the option to lessees currently residing in a life-lease property to remain in their current unit under new management with the new landlord.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 208 provides lessees with the security to enjoy their senior years free from concerns regarding their housing situation and protecting their very valuable investments while also allowing the opportunity to take an active role in the operation of their life lease.

With that, I would like to again thank the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat for putting forward this comprehensive and well-thought-out piece of legislation, and I look forward to hearing the rest of the debate. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, you indicated to me that you wish to speak.

Mr. Chase: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate this opportunity, particularly due to the fact that three years from next month, when I'm assuming we'll probably be running another election, I'll be a senior and I will be looking more intently at life leases than I currently have. I consider myself to have a good lease on life right now. I feel healthy and far from wealthy but wise, no doubt.

The work that has been done by the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat and the efficacy that has been noted by the hon.

Member for Edmonton-Centre and the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West, to name a few of the individuals who have contributed to today's discussion, point out the need for life leases and also the need for guarantees. We're aware, particularly in B.C., of the leaky condo syndrome, and we have to make sure that within this lease legislation there is protection for seniors who invest in life leases with so much of their funding up front that should there be structural problems within the formation, they're not stuck for the repairs.

4:50

Seniors need to be made aware, in the same way that condo owners need to be aware, of any debts that the housing development may have. I know that I was unpleasantly surprised by some of the costs of projects in the condo that I'm currently living in in Edmonton. Also, as has been pointed out by other individuals, the need for a trustee, with all the meaning of the word trust applied to that trustee, to manage the monies that are collected from the seniors in their life leases is absolutely important.

With the condo situation currently condo organizations seem to be prevented from investing the condo association's money in GICs because that money has to be always available for repairs and expenditures. I would hope that in the proposed legislation with regard to life leases, the money, or at least a portion of the money, could be safely invested, with of course the agreement of the lessees, in some type of safe interest gaining investment so that if repairs were required, seniors would not have to dig further deeply into their savings in order to render their housing development more acceptable or at least maintain its current situation.

One thing the Life Leases Act doesn't do in the case of for-profit organizations is protect the lessees, the seniors, from rent gouging. Several members of this House can remember what became close to a 30-hour debate on affordable housing and rent controls. There doesn't appear to be anything within this legislation to protect seniors from escalating rents, and in order to make this document even more acceptable, some type of provision for rent protection would be most welcomed. Seniors should have a sense going in, especially those who choose to go in a for-profit organization. They should be able to sign a contract indicating what would be a reasonable rent increase over the years and under what conditions the rents would be collectively agreed upon to be raised.

We've had situations throughout Alberta where because there was no ceiling on rents, the only legislation allowed that you could raise the rent by whatever you liked if you only did it once a year. I know that there have been very creative landlords who have managed to get around that by charging extra fees for cable, extra fees for heating, and sometimes repairs that were supposedly structurally important to the whole facility were then foisted onto the individual in the specific condo or, in this case, long-term lease. So it's extremely important for seniors, whether they've been able to accumulate savings over the years which they would theoretically like to pass on to their descendants or in the case of vulnerable seniors who life has not been kind to, that their investments be protected.

The whole notion of a life lease is a very positive one, and it's turning out that adults as young as 55 are looking at these types of developments because of their potential security.

With those thoughts in mind in terms of setting what can be reasonable increases, guaranteeing structural support so that there aren't any surprises, I think this Life Leases Act goes a long way in terms of achieving the sustainability and fiscal stability that seniors are looking for. Like the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre who preceded me, I will be looking forward to amendments that close the loopholes with regard to the potential of gouging because of

structural construction deficiencies and the concerns over the possibility of rent gouging and also, as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre mentioned, the role of the trustee in looking after the financing of the life-lease building that seniors find themselves in.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. And I would like to thank the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat for bringing forth a strong piece of legislation which is probably 80 per cent of the way there. Thank you.

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

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am excited today to rise to speak in favour of Bill 208, the Life Leases Act, brought forward by my friend the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat. I have to say that the last few speakers have had some good points, the members for Lethbridge-West, Cypress-Medicine Hat, and, yes, the members for Calgary-Varsity and Edmonton-Centre as well. [interjection] Yes, I am feeling well today.

I have to say that Bill 208 is important because life leases are quickly becoming an attractive alternative living arrangement for many seniors in Alberta. Mr. Speaker, I've been one of the principal shareholders of a property management company in Calgary for a number of years, and real estate has always been of interest. I think that this is really a step forward when it comes to looking at options for accommodation, particularly for our seniors. Life leases, however, are a living arrangement whereby a tenant purchases the right to occupy a residence for the remainder of his or her life. Now, they do not purchase the property outright, as is the case in a condominium sale, for example. Rather, the land is held by the sponsor group that manages the complex.

Mr. Speaker, there are numerous types of advantages in dealing with this type of arrangement. First, life leases tend to be more affordable than standard condominium ownership. We have seen a dramatic rise over the last decade in the cost of real estate in this province, particularly in our cities. Secondly, life leases offer a greater predictability since there are no rent increases. Thirdly, most life-lease arrangements offer some form of support service such as housekeeping or meal preparation, which, again, are particularly important to seniors.

Now, Mr. Speaker, because of some of these advantages, life-lease living arrangements are an attractive living option, as I mentioned, for seniors. The Member for Calgary-Varsity mentioned that people even 55 and older would consider living in such a place. They're a viable choice as they provide services along with, essentially, the freedom of home ownership. Because life leases are targeted toward seniors and because many seniors live on fixed incomes and cannot suffer large financial setbacks, it becomes particularly important to continue to ensure that tenants are protected when entering into such an arrangement as a life lease.

Bill 208 provides exactly this protection. Without a doubt, the most effective way to ensure that any consumer or leaser is protected is to ensure that they have access to information. To this end, Bill 208 requires that life-lease landlords disclose several critical pieces of information to potential tenants before they accept a prelease payment. Now, just for clarity, Mr. Speaker, a prelease payment is a holding fee that is paid to the landlord while the complex is being constructed.

The bill would require landlords to disclose the estimated entrance fee, which is essentially the down payment that is required for the complex itself. This disclosure would inform a tenant of how much money they would be expected to pay up front when moving into their unit pursuant to a life lease. After all, Mr. Speaker, a consumer

is not going to pay a holding fee if he or she is unable to pay the final cost of the lease.

The second required piece of information that would be disclosed by a life-lease landlord would be the projected completion date. Again, the need for this information to me is patent and clear. A consumer might not be willing to put a holding fee on a property if he or she were unable to occupy that property for several years.

Now, the third piece of required information deals directly with the entrance fee. Essentially, the landlord would be required to disclose the minimum amount of the entrance fee that would be held in trust. Mr. Speaker, when a tenant lives in a life-lease complex, landlords are required . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but the time limit for consideration of this item of business has concluded, so we can continue the next time.

5:00 Motions Other than Government Motions

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission

511. Mr. Vandermeer:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to review how complaints are addressed by the Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission to ensure a fair process for both complainants and respondents.

Mr. Vandermeer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In light of the human rights legislation passed this spring, I will not be moving my motion as the intent of it has already been achieved.

Thank you.

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

Executive Vehicles

513. Mr. Kang moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to require that all vehicles purchased through the executive vehicle allowance be low-emission vehicles.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Service Alberta, pursuant to Treasury Board directive 06/88, is responsible for providing vehicles to certain senior government officials. Currently, the employee may choose whichever year, make, model, or optional equipment they wish. The employee must abide by a certain yearly price limit determined by the ministers of Finance and Service Alberta or exceed the limit and pay the difference. The price limit for an executive vehicle was \$43,500 in 2008.

The government has insisted that it is moving in that direction of increasing the fuel efficiency requirement for executive fleet vehicles. A list of ministerial class vehicles for 2009 shows two cabinet ministers choosing hybrids. I congratulate those two cabinet ministers, and they know who they are.

Mr. Speaker, Service Alberta claims that vehicle management has initiated the arrival of 92 hybrids, including five in the executive fleet. That is according to the Service Alberta annual report 2008-09. Service Alberta's minimal progress is likely the result of the fact that the ministry merely encourages the purchase of low-emission and hybrid vehicles rather than requiring it. The 2008-09 annual report on page 12 and the minister herself both indicate that

executives are encouraged to purchase low-emission vehicles but not required to.

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

Mr. Speaker, what kind of cars could the government purchase? Some of the most efficient examples include the 2009 Toyota Prius, which gives 48 miles to the gallon in the city and 45 miles per gallon on the highway; the 2009 Honda Civic hybrid, 40 miles per gallon in the city and 45 on the highway; and the 2009 Nissan Altima hybrid, 35 miles per gallon in the city and 33 miles per gallon on the highway. Instead, what kind of cars are they purchasing? The Minister of Culture and Community Spirit: a 2008 Infiniti EX35. The Minister of Health and Wellness: a 2007 Jeep Grand Cherokee. That one only gets 17 miles in the city and 21 miles on the highway, and the Infiniti gets 16 to 17 miles per gallon in the city and 23 to 24 miles per gallon on the highway. The Minister of Justice: a 2008 Audi A4, getting 15 to 21 miles per gallon in the city and 25 to 31 miles on the highway. It all depends on how hard she pushes on the gas pedal.

Naturally, we want the government fleet to be green. Members on this side of the caucus have repeatedly raised the issue of fuel efficiency requirements for the government vehicles. In 2008, when the caucus members questioned the government regarding low-emission vehicles, like on April 24, April 29, May 1, May 20, June 4, and in October of 2008, the minister's response every time was some variation on: we are moving in that direction. Every time we raised the issue, the minister said that we are moving in that direction, but I think the minister is too, too slow in moving in that direction: no definite answer, no concrete date or vision to phase out all the high-emission vehicles from the government fleet.

Given the increasing concern over global climate change – we hear about it every day – every other day some country is taking pretty harsh steps to clean up their environment. With the need for greater energy efficiency in our daily lives, the case for low-emission vehicles should be clear. Lately the cabinet on the islands of the Maldives was going to hold their meeting under water. They were taking lessons in scuba diving, sign language. I think we are lucky enough; we are not at that point. The islands of the Maldives are only about seven feet above sea level, so they will be the first ones to go down if we do not take care of the environment. Beirut, Bangladesh: the examples are numerous.

More generally, low-emission vehicles such as hybrids and/or alternative fuel vehicles make sense environmentally, and reduced emissions will contribute to cleaner air not only for us Albertans but for Canada and for the whole world. It will make a significant difference in terms of climate change and public health: a lot less asthma, a lot fewer other diseases related to the environment. Low-emission vehicles will also make sense economically considering the lower fuel costs overall.

Greening the government fleet is a more effective use of taxpayer dollars. If the public must subsidize these cars, it is not unreasonable to expect that the use of such vehicles is in the public interest. A low-emission standard for executive vehicles will demonstrate leadership and commitment at the highest level of government to fuel efficiency and environmental sustainability.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans want to see environmental leadership from this government. What kind of message does it send to have the highest levels of government able to drive inefficient gas guzzlers at public expense? If anybody should be concerned about the greenhouse gas emissions, the concern should start right here, and it should be the government leading the parade by example. The minister claims to be moving in the direction of more low-emission

government vehicles, but drifting in a particular direction is still drifting. This motion will make the government's determination to improve the fuel efficiency of its executive fleet clear to Albertans. The total cost to taxpayers of executive vehicles was approximately \$2.1 million in 2009. That's according to the most recent list provided to the library.

Other provinces are moving forward in greening their government vehicle fleets. In Alberta we are going to be left behind. For example, in B.C. they have been taking action since the year 2000. The government set their goals to reduce. Their target was to reduce the greenhouse gas emission by 16 per cent from 2000 to 2005. They've been going hybrids, biodiesel, and driving smart. They have been promoting different kinds of initiatives for driving, even in Saskatchewan and Manitoba, and I think we are falling far behind.

5:10

This motion, Mr. Speaker, is also comparable with the government policy, and the Minister of Service Alberta has also been very supportive of this idea in the Assembly. "The vehicles that we are moving towards will be hybrid vehicles, as many as we can." This is "something that we certainly need to move towards." "With respect to the whole executive fleet and greening the whole fleet, that's something that is very important." That's from the minister. We should not be dragging our feet to move forward very quickly to put Alberta on the path to lowering our greenhouse gas emissions drastically.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I rise to speak in support of Motion 513. This is just one way in which Albertans could see their government as setting an example for regular Albertans by showing some personal restraint. We have vehicle fleets, and members of cabinet and a number of deputy ministers and so on have access to vehicle allowances. If they were to demonstrate the type of conservation, a word that goes right along with conservative, then people would see this government as true conservatives in terms of conserving gas and doing the "right thing" as opposed to the far-right thing, as we've recently seen with our newly elected Wildrose leader.

Now, credit where credit is due. We as members of the Assembly receive vehicle allowances in terms of the number of kilometres we drive, and we also have fleet cards, which assist us with our gas mileages. It's wonderful when we see examples of individuals putting aside their own necessary physical comfort for a vehicle that does the job.

Now, I want to take a moment to recognize the Member for Edmonton-Calder. While he is not a cabinet minister, he is right in the theme of redemption, that I began my member's statement with. He has realized some of the mistakes associated with coffee sweeteners, he has realized some of the problems associated with Twitter, and he has, to use almost Christian language, been reborn in the form of a Smart car driver. This wonderful man, who has changed his lifestyle, was featured in the *Edmonton Journal* this weekend in his Smart car delivering diapers, thousands I believe, that could barely fit within the confines of the Smart car. He managed to somehow buckle them down, and he delivered these to an agency. It's that type of leadership, Mr. Speaker, that we're looking for from the government as a whole.

We as individuals, as I say, benefit from the generosity afforded to us courtesy of the taxpayers and the vehicles that we choose to drive. I myself admit that I started as a member driving from Calgary in a V10, a 1999 Dodge V10, but I saw the light. I saw the

light. I now drive a Dodge Compass, Mr. Speaker, that gets very close to 35 miles to the gallon on the highway. I know that it's not a Smart car, but it is a smart purchase for me, and the taxpayers are benefiting from the fact that when the big brute Dodge leaves the garage on the few occasions to pull the fifth wheel trailer, it is myself who pays the bill and not the taxpayers. What Motion 513 is looking for is the government setting the example, recognizing that at least for in-city travel . . . [interjections]

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, the Member for Calgary-Varsity has the floor.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I appreciate the support from the hon. sustainable resources minister, who is a Calgary-Varsity resident and wants only the best for not only Calgary-Varsity residents, but I'm sure he wants the best for all Albertans. I'm sure he will be one of the individuals voting for Motion 513 because he's a believer in conservation. The hon. minister of sustainable resources by his own title wants to see sustainability in this province. We need to start right here within this House, right here within this government and purchase vehicles that show restraint, that will deliver the job because of their hybrid efficiencies but not cost either the environment or the taxpayers undue concerns.

Now, as I say, this Motion 513, which the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall proposes, I would like to suggest is just the starting point, that we as individuals take account of our own purchases and the bills that we submit, that the taxpayers so thoughtfully pick up on our behalf because, after all, we're elected to do their bidding. But if we could show the type of restraint personally that is being shown in Motion 513, then possibly by leading by example, Albertans would be encouraged to look at the types of vehicles they drive and the recognition that while this province was built on nonrenewable resources and we are trying to be more efficient in our extraction of those resources and our utilization of those resources – wouldn't it be nice if the people of Alberta could look at the province because they're getting into the hybrid mode.

Yes, we're behind other provinces like B.C., but we know that we can surpass B.C. We have the ability even in our recessionary experience, and possibly because of our recessionary experience we know the value of a dollar. If we can save those dollars and save those emissions by driving smartly, as Motion 513 proposes for the government fleet to adopt, we're so much farther ahead.

Now, the hon. sustainable resources minister mentioned my fondness for my truck. I will confess that I have a fondness for that truck because I feel safe within that truck. I feel safe pulling a 24-foot fifth wheel on the few occasions when I venture out, usually no farther than the Bow valley to enjoy the camping experience with the solar panels firmly attached to my roof to provide the necessary survival mode. However, the reason I mention my fondness for my truck is that it would not be smart, for example, for either sustainable resource officers or conservation officers or fishery individuals to be driving along rural roads, particularly forestry roads, in Smart cars. They would find themselves in great difficulties, particularly as the weather worsens. But where we can, where it's an urban circumstance or primarily a highway circumstance as opposed to forestry roads, I would encourage the hon. members of this Legislature to quickly pass Motion 513 for not only the good of Alberta, but let us be true leaders for this nation and for the world.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

5:20

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising to actually speak in favour of this motion. I'm inclined to support this motion. I would be more inclined to support this motion if it had been a little bit more inclusive, if it hadn't been written in such a way that was designed to perhaps score political points as opposed to environmental points, because the motion refers only to the executive fleet. I know that there are some reasons and some rationale behind that, but the fact of the matter is that if we really wanted to do something, we would expand beyond and concentrate on more than the executive fleet. When I say that I will probably support this motion, I would be more prone and feel much better about supporting this motion because in fact I believe that there would be more opportunity for this motion to actually result in action on the part of the government if the motion had been thought through just a little bit more.

In fact, the Member for Calgary-Varsity has just been talking a little bit about some of the shortcomings in this motion where there are practicalities that are associated. He talked about some. He talked about weather related and road condition related, but there are also some practicalities that are limiting factors for even the executive fleet. One would assume that the executive fleet is only ever driven in good driving conditions in urban centres, but that's not always the case. There are circumstances where some of the vehicles that are part of the executive fleet have to deal with some difficult kinds of terrain and, more importantly, some remote areas. Some of the ministers in particular but some of the other officials that drive these vehicles find themselves in very remote areas, and service in those remote areas on some of the more exotic vehicles is difficult. Hybrid, for example, is not available in all communities yet. The capacity to do repair on hybrid vehicles requires a very significant investment on the part of the dealer. If a dealer in a small town is not, you know, allocated more than three or four hybrid cars in a given year, at this point in time – it will certainly, undoubtedly change in the future – they're not in a position to be able to buy the necessary equipment to service the vehicles, so there are limitations.

I recognize that the motion does not refer specifically to hybrid vehicles. It does talk about low fuel consumptions, and I give the member credit for that because I don't think that we should be restricting ourselves just to one technology. There are a number of other alternatives that would achieve the same result, so from that perspective the motion is well written.

Mr. Speaker, the reason why I say that we need to think beyond the executive fleet is to look at government-wide operations. We operate about 3,400 vehicles in this government, and there are a lot of those vehicles that would be appropriately targeted for this kind of low fuel consumption target. The Member for Calgary-Varsity pointed out that there are some that clearly wouldn't be. We've made some progress. Admittedly, there's room to make more progress, but we have in excess of a hundred vehicles within the government now that are hybrid vehicles. We have a number of other vehicles that although not hybrid would be classified as being low fuel consumption standard. So we're making some progress.

I would urge all members of the Assembly to think about this motion. I urge members to support this motion because it's sending a message that the government needs to hear, that Albertans need to hear. But let's not just target the executive fleet. Let's think about government-wide operations, and let's be reasonable. Let's not try and get a one-size-fits-all in place and put in a policy that may or may not be practical. Let's instead think of a motion like this as being an opportunity for government to have another look at its overall fleet operations and determine whether or not there could be opportunities for other vehicles to be targeted.

I'm the Minister of Environment. I certainly could not in all good conscience stand up in this House and oppose this motion. This

motion is inherently urging the government to do good things for the environment. What I do point out, though, is that the motion, perhaps, is targeted a little bit more to a very specific, small segment of vehicles that the government operates. One would have to question whether there is political motivation in limiting that or if in fact it was done because the member honestly felt that this would be an appropriate way to move this agenda along.

From my perspective, I'll support the motion, but I'll support the motion almost on the assumption that the words "where appropriate" or "when possible" or "where feasible" would be read into the motion. I know we can't amend motions. There's not a process to amend motions, but the motion also says to "urge the government." It's not binding in that perspective. So from the point of view that I believe that we can send a message to the government, to my colleagues in government, I support this motion. From the point of view of having a hard-and-fast rule, I think that it's an example of trying to fit one size into all packages, and that doesn't necessarily work when we start dealing with issues like this. But, Mr. Speaker, I will be supporting this motion.

Thank you very much.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the Minister of Environment for the previous comments. I know that it may be a surprise to some that we're debating Motion 513 today, but I do hope that there are more speakers on the government side than just the one because I think there is an opportunity here to talk about possibilities in other things that we could be doing as leaders to try and set an example of how we can make a better world and a better Alberta.

It's possible that the motion is before its time, and that wouldn't be the first time that I've seen that in my years in the House. I'm remembering the then Leader of the Official Opposition Ken Nicol, who introduced and campaigned long and hard for a stability fund, which I think is now called the sustainability fund after it was adopted by the government. I'm thinking of the legislation from the then Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Beverly, Alice Hanson, on violence against women and family violence prevention, which then came back under the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek and was accepted by the government, or, you know, even the idea of a savings plan and various endowments that we're now hearing the government talk about. So it's not the first time that we've had members of the Liberal opposition introduce an idea that took a while to get traction with the hon. members opposite, but that doesn't mean that it's not possible. I am an optimistic person, obviously, in that I'm still standing here in this House.

But I think there's a real opportunity here, and I don't want to see the government miss that opportunity to lead by example.

5:30

I often cast back to some advice that I got from a very well-placed executive in the oil sector who said: well, you know, Laurie, we look to the government to kind of point the way, to show leadership where they think we should be going, and if we don't see any movement from them, if we don't see any examples set, well, we're not going to put ourselves out there. So, you know, people do look to the government members, the front bench, the Assembly members as a whole to lead the way on issues like this. It's okay; you can be a bit cutting edge. That's all right. You could be a little zippy. You could add that to your resumé.

I think the other issue here is around – and this is a touchy subject, so I'm trying to come into this carefully. We are aware of a

branding issue that we have in Alberta, particularly with our neighbours to the south. They've taken some very particular stands about environmental protection and taken some very deliberate moves there that are reflecting back on us. We had those municipalities that actually listed us as having dirty oil. We're struggling with that. It's a communications problem, but it's also an action problem. It is not enough for us to just be paying for more glossy brochures of lovely mountain scenes, going: no, no; really, we're very green. People are looking to us and scrutinizing us to see if we actually are taking action behind those words.

With mass communication, with the constant use of the Internet they can check up on us. It's not as though we can sort of send out our brochure and hope nobody looks back. They can be checking on this debate in the House. They can check the published list that we got from the library of who was driving what kind of vehicle. I mean, it's not hard to get this information. I think it is important that we move forward on this.

I'll use a personal example, and I'll say up front that I have an advantage in that this is my riding. I can walk to work, which I know most of the rest of you can't if you're coming from your constituencies.

An Hon. Member: Long walk.

Ms Blakeman: Very long walk.

I also know that many, many of you, in fact, have purchased condominiums or rent apartments in my fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre, so I do encourage you to walk, and I think some of you do.

I made a commitment a couple of years ago to try to reduce my driving, you know, down to three days a week and then two days a week and down to one day a week. Just recently my partner and I decided to go down to one vehicle, share one vehicle as a move in having a smaller environmental footprint. Obviously, vehicles are a way that you can do that. We've taken the next step in that move, and we bought a hybrid. It's working out pretty well. Thankfully, I got winter tires put on it. I was in Lethbridge on the weekend and had to drive back. From Nanton to Balzac it was nothing but snow, but it served me very well. We can all take these steps. They don't have to be huge and showy. They can be small and incremental.

I think the opportunity to pass a motion like this signals that the government is interested and, you know, is interested in starting with itself. When we talk about the executive vehicle allowance, that is starting with ourselves. It could have been mischief-making, which was, I think, the point that the Minister of Environment was talking about, but knowing the member who sponsored this, he's not as much a mischief-maker as some of my colleagues. So I'm going to take it that he was pretty straight ahead on that.

Indeed, you know, maybe we could have expanded it to talk about the larger government fleet. Knowing that we have 3,400 vehicles that are considered government fleet vehicles and a hundred that have now been purchased that are hybrids is great, but it's 3 per cent of the whole fleet. I think we need to be a bit more muscular in how we approach this if we are going to try to lead by example.

I think that the Minister of Environment also made some really good points. You know: don't narrow the box. Don't try to shove everybody into driving around in a Toyota Prius because it just doesn't work. The wonderful thing about Alberta is that we've got 83 different constituencies. Some of them are pretty far away, a lot of roads, a lot of miles between here and where you finally stop, at home or your constituency office. Expecting someone to drive a Smart car to Slave Lake is just dumb, and it's pretty unfair for the person that has to drive it. But for some of the people that are in

urban centres, a Smart car might be a good idea or any of the other hybrids that are available. Frankly, Lexus has just come out with a really high-end, complete hybrid vehicle. Well, you know, we've got some people over there: what they want is a nice vehicle. Fine. I'd be much happier if you chose the Lexus hybrid than if you chose something else, like my colleague's V10 or whatever it was. There are different possibilities that are available to match a number of different driving requirements but also personal tastes.

In this Assembly we still allow members of the executive branch and the deputy ministers and various other chairs of committees, et cetera, to choose the vehicles that they want to drive aside from the fleet cars that are made available for people that are driving on government business. You know, if we're going to do that, fine. But there's a range of cars that you can look at that are low emission. I think that's what my colleague was trying to capture.

As I come to closing in support of Motion 513, the issue is whether this is binding. You know, there's support for the motion from my hon. government colleagues if it's voluntary. Just a little reminder that our voluntary requirements have not had a lot of uptake on them. I would prefer if there was something, as I said, a bit more muscular, a bit more vigorous, a bit more committed to actually following this. I don't necessarily see this as having that proviso added onto the end of the motion, but I don't see that that's a reason not to support it. I hope that we will get a great deal of support from a number of other members of the House today in support of my colleague from Calgary-McCall and his Motion 513.

Thank you very much. I do urge everyone to support the motion.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure to stand and talk to the motion. I'm going to talk to the motion to say that, you know, in principle there is merit, especially the merit of environment. But in practicality I sure do not want to see this go in any compulsory type of direction. Let me tell you a couple of reasons why. One of them, of course, is my location. Number one, the last time I bought a vehicle, my dealer very much talked to me that he felt the vehicle wasn't secure enough, if you want to call it that, that it didn't have enough stability for the conditions that we have to operate under. Also, the discussion was around that if it's used predominantly on a highway, that that also causes a concern because you're not going to get the value out of it that you think. Thirdly, there are really no vehicles being manufactured except one truck – and it's not the truck of my choice – that offers the option.

I will say this to you, that in my constituency it is really imperative that I have a vehicle that, unfortunately, has to be a four-wheel drive. Some places I can't even get to in a four-wheel drive, and depending on road conditions, most of the time I have to use that four-wheel drive.

5:40

Mr. Speaker, I also want to bring attention – and I can't see anybody here that was with me – that as recently as last Thursday, I believe it was, we were at the fire safety building, and we had discussions and had a demonstration of safety and what firemen need to do in order to be very effective at car accidents. One of the major concerns ends up being a vehicle, what you would call in this situation, that you can't hear run. You get into an accident, and it takes more time. You can't hear the vehicle run, and you subconsciously forget about that. You don't know if it's running, and you start to try, at the time of an emergency, to take the individual out that may be hurt in a vehicle. Then all of a sudden what happens is

the vehicle takes off. You have to make sure that all of those hybrids are blocked up initially. All of this takes just a little bit of extra time.

All I say to you is don't make it compulsory. I understand that from the aspect of the hon. member opposite: "Yeah. Just shut it off." That's easy to do if a vehicle is running, but you don't know if it's running. That's the point.

Ms Blakeman: It's lit up like a Christmas tree.

Mr. Danyluk: It's not a Christmas tree. Lights stay on in any vehicle. I mean, I would love for you to come to the fire department and let them explain to you some of the challenges that they have with hybrids.

Mr. Speaker, my point being, I want to stress that, yes, there are some practical places that these vehicles could be used, but please don't try to impose them on everybody because we will not be able to represent our constituents in rural Alberta to the ability that we can with the vehicles we have in place. Will they develop to the point where maybe we can? Yes. Did I ask when I bought a new vehicle, being the environmentalist that I am? No.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Hehr: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed an honour to come in to speak to Motion 513. This motion would require the executive fleet to be comprised of low-emission vehicles. I think it's definitely an idea whose time has come.

Just to go back in time a little bit, Mr. Speaker, as recently as 2004 this government was actually still contemplating the science around global warming and whether it was, in fact, true or not. Thankfully, we've passed that day, but as other people in this House have mentioned, we still have a challenge in this province of projecting I guess what would be called clean environmental standards. I think that one of the ways we could do that here to silence some of the naysayers out there, silence some of the critics of our oil industry, silence some of these people who are protesting up north is to do some of the little things correctly. One of the little things would be to have our government lead by example and require the cars of at least the executive fleet to be low-emission vehicles.

If we do these little things, some of the big things that we can't really do – let's face it; we can't really limit the amount of oil that we produce because that is subject to what the world wants and what the world needs and what the world markets are prepared to pay. We're not at fault for that, but what we can keep in control is what we actually do ourselves as individuals and as government. This would be a great way for the government to lead by example. Go to low-emission vehicles; provide a little bit of cover for our oil and gas industry. Like you say, let's move to the forefront.

Let's put out a nice big announcement paid for by the Public Affairs Bureau that we send out to Saudi Arabia that the Alberta government fleet has now gone to low-emissions vehicles. We seem to be using the Public Affairs Bureau for quite a bit lately. You know, a lot of money is coming out of that thing. I heard the Premier's address to the province. Well, I hear these advertisements on the radio all the time, at least in between Edmonton and Calgary, on the looming brownouts and blackouts that are coming to Alberta. It looks like we are putting the Public Affairs money to use, so we might as well maybe do it this time. We'll send it around the world and say: Alberta gets in with the 21st century, and look what they're doing here. I really think that might be a good thing. In fact, it would be a good thing. It would show that our leaders get it. It

would show that our Premier gets it. It would show that we, too, are trying to do our part as an oil-producing area of the world to at least do some of the small things correctly when a lot of times the big things are out of reach or can't be moved on as quickly as we'd like. That is one of the things.

I also bring up a little bit of sort of what has been discussed here earlier, the debate on whether we make this compulsory or not. It is an interesting debate. Sure, we're loath, especially in a jurisdiction like Alberta, to limit choice. I know it's a darn difficult thing. Personally, I would love to see us be able to come in here and write a law that says: no one shall drive a Hummer. You know, I for one would think that's a decent law, that really at this time and day there comes a point where you look around and say: does society need this? At certain times in certain constituencies we may in fact need that Hummer, but it's so limited that I think governments maybe should be moving in the direction of saying that sometimes this stuff is unnecessary. Sometimes for the overall betterment of mankind and protection of future generations maybe this type of stuff should be limited.

Now, I just point to that as an example. If the government tomorrow acted on that, I know they'll have thousands of people, including car owners, average Albertans, producers of these vehicles, protesting on the Legislature steps saying: "This is unfair. This is un-Albertan. My choice is taken away." I realize that. But that's the trouble sometimes when you make things – decisions like this have to be made with some sort of, I guess, force to them. That one is difficult to do it on, but this one is not. We have people, in particular leadership here in Alberta, that would be able to comply with this, I believe, relatively easily despite some of the protestations we've heard here tonight.

I believe that limiting choice, especially to a narrow group of people, could in fact be used and could in fact be used to show Alberta in a positive light. Sometimes I think that possibly governments have to get better at making some of these hard choices that may in fact have to limit some choice on the extreme edges. You know, we're loath to do it . . .

Mr. Elniski: The problem with socialists.

Mr. Hehr: I heard that, and I'm not a socialist. But, needless to say, governments should in fact at some point in time get into limiting things. There are certain times that leadership comes from being able to say: "No, I guess we're not going to be kids in the candy store. No, we're not going to get everything we want. No, because it says that we're going to do it." That type of comment is absurd. We have to get down to the fact that sometimes we have to make decisions that are better overall, that are better for future generations, that are based on science, and that sometimes say that we're going to do things differently.

I'm glad I came here and got the opportunity to speak to Motion 513. I believe it's something this government could do that would have relatively little impact on our executive fleet's daily lives. I believe that they would be able to choose a vehicle that would still allow them to be able to move around freely, that hopefully would get to 99.9 per cent of the constituents. Maybe a local coffee shop could be used to meet some of them who couldn't be met at certain locations. If some meeting of the minds or the Internet could be used or the telephone could be used to maybe meet those people, that 1 per cent of people we could talk about, maybe some alternative could be reached.

Thank you very much for allowing me the time to speak, and we'll move on from there.

5:50

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

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the Member for Calgary-Buffalo has just done us a great service. He's really pinpointed the difference between a liberal and a conservative. A conservative looks at behaviour that he doesn't approve of and he says, "I'm not going to do that." A liberal looks at it and says, "Not only am I not going to do it; I'm going to make it illegal for everybody else to do it as well." So thank you for that clarification. It may explain your great success at the polls.

Again, I'm going to support everything the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs has said for reasons to vote against this, but I just want to remind everybody of what the motion reads, what you're voting for. The motion reads:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to require that all vehicles purchased through the executive vehicle allowance be low-emission vehicles.

So it's not limited. It's not optional. It's required. It's all vehicles. As the Minister of Environment has already pointed out, there are several thousand cars, 3,400 vehicles, in the government fleet. Over a hundred of them already are low-emission. So where it makes sense, we're beginning to move in that direction. Not only is this motion political grandstanding, but it's also redundant. I'd urge everybody to vote against it.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to speak?

The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall to close.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thanks to all the members for their participation in the debate. I'm pleased to have the opportunity to say a final few words on Motion 513.

For the Minister of Municipal Affairs. The minister brought up an important point about fire safety. We do not think that this is a reason to oppose this motion. Our fire safety personnel are very well trained, and they have handled a number of innovations when it comes to vehicles, electric windows for example. Our fire personnel are very smart and committed, and they will figure something out about this, too.

This motion will urge the government to observe low-emission standards for all executive vehicles as just a start, and this motion makes sense, Mr. Speaker. Low-emission vehicles lead to improved quality and contribute to the fight against global climate change. By going green, the government can also save taxpayers money and fuel costs. Finally, there's a symbolic value to this initiative.

I want to thank the Minister of Environment for his support of the motion. The Minister of Environment is right. This is not done to get any political points here. There's a sincere, genuine concern about the environment, and that's why the motion was put forward. The government's fleet should be low emission wherever possible but not necessarily hybrids.

Mr. Speaker, this is just the beginning. That's why I said that I urge the government to purchase low-emission vehicles. The senior leadership for our government should be setting an example for all Albertans, and this is the way to do it.

The government's progress on this initiative has been disappointing. Only two members of the cabinet have used their taxpayer-funded vehicle allowance to purchase hybrid cars. That's what I said before, too. Service Alberta mentions that five more are on the way for the executive fleet. To those who might object that these low-emission standards are too expensive, we respond that hybrid vehicles are comparable in price to vehicles ministers and senior

bureaucrats are driving as we speak. To those who might object that this motion is redundant because the government is already committed to increasing the proportion of hybrid vehicles in its fleet, we respond that this is simply not enough.

The Minister of Service Alberta still insists on merely encouraging our public servants to drive low-emission vehicles if they so choose, but Albertans expect real standards when it comes to protecting the environment. The Minister of Service Alberta has repeatedly said in this House that the government is moving in the direction of increasing the proportion of low-emission vehicles in the executive fleet, but drifting in a particular direction is still drifting, Mr. Speaker.

I urge all members of this Assembly to join me in voting for this motion so that Albertans can be assured that we are moving strongly in this direction of a greener, more sustainable government and so we can help protect our environment for future generations to come.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[The voice vote indicated that Motion Other than Government Motion 513 lost]

Mr. Chase: Mr. Speaker, may I suggest waiving the bell time?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:56 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

For the motion:

Blakeman	Hehr	McQueen
Chase	Horne	Renner
Dallas	Kang	Sarich
Denis		

Against the motion:

Benito	Elniski	Lukaszuk
Bhardwaj	Fritz	Morton
Blackett	Groeneveld	Oberle
Danyluk	Jacobs	Prins
DeLong	Johnson	Rodney
Doerksen	Johnston	Webber
Drysdale	Knight	

Totals:	For – 10	Against – 20
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[Motion Other than Government Motion 513 lost]

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

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that the Assembly now stand adjourned till 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 6:02 p.m. to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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