



Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday, March 15, 2010

Issue 17

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 27th Legislature
 Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, March 15, 2010

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Welcome. Good afternoon.

Let us pray. We give thanks for Your abundant blessings to our province and ourselves. We ask for guidance and the will to follow it. Amen.

Hon. members and ladies and gentlemen and young people, we will now participate in the singing of our national anthem. Today with us is Mr. Paul Lorieau, who will lead us, and I'd invite all to join 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.

Introduction of Visitors

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

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What a thrill it is for me to have the singular honour of introducing our very, very special guest in the Legislative Assembly today. Fresh from his posting in Brussels and living now in Aylmer – just across the river, as it were, from Ottawa – is the ambassador that we greet today from the Republic of Italy. Italy and Canada have had many very special relations. We have 82,000 Canadians of Italian descent living here in Alberta. Over the lunchtime we had an opportunity to have a conversation about many things, but the wise words from the ambassador were that many people in his country expect a great deal from Canada. We resolve not to disappoint him or to disappoint the Italians that are expecting us to do the very great work that Canadians do to be sustainable and to deliver our products to market.

With that introduction, may I welcome and may you join me in welcoming the ambassador from Italy here to Alberta today. A very special welcome to His Excellency Ambassador Andrea Meloni. Please rise.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of my colleague from Athabasca-Redwater it is a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly 18 students, one teacher, and four parent helpers from H.A. Kostash school in Smoky Lake. They have travelled here to visit the Legislature Building. Miss Chelsea Evans and Mrs. Nancy Senetza, Mrs. Michelle Palichuk, Mr. Rick Anton, and Mrs. Giselle Anton are

here. They are seated in the members' gallery today. I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, it is also my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly 28 students, two teachers, and two parent helpers that have travelled two and a half hours from Vilna school to Edmonton today to tour the Legislature Building. With them are teachers Mrs. Rayanna Tremblay and Mrs. Tanya Pelech and parent helpers Mrs. Laurie Shapka and Mr. Ken Krieg. They are seated in the public gallery today, and I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly a group of 36 students and two teachers from one of my favourite schools in the Lauderdale district of the Edmonton-Calder constituency. With us today are teacher Mr. Dennis Ralston and teacher Mr. Mathieu Brosseau Tremblay. I did not have an opportunity to ask Mr. Brosseau Tremblay if he was part of the clan, but he's an awfully good-looking fellow, so I must assume that he is. In spite of that, I would ask them all to rise now and receive the traditional warm greeting of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Chase: Merci, M. le Directeur. Je veux vous présenter et à tous mes collègues dans l'Assemblée deux classes d'élèves de l'école Gabrielle-Roy, qui est située dans Edmonton-Gold Bar. S'il vous plaît, souhaitez la bienvenue aux deux classes, une du sixième niveau et l'autre du neuvième, avec leurs professeurs et leurs parents: Meyranie Giroux, Nicole Hébert-Royer, et Nadia Duchesneau. S'il vous plaît, levez-vous et recevez la réception de l'Assemblée.

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

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you two outstanding Albertans. One is Annie Changarathil. Annie has been a single mother. She's worked for the Alberta government. She is currently working for NAIT. Her greatest success is raising her young daughter, who is in grade 8. Her name is Judy. She's a 13-year-old. She goes to Jean Forest leadership academy. It's a girl's-only, uniform school near NAIT. I recently met Judy at a public event for India Day ceremonies. She said she wants to do something meaningful with her life to help others, so I thought I'd bring her down to the Legislature and introduce her to all of our friends here. She's won many awards in academic achievement, leadership, volunteerism, Indian classical dance. I thought that with bright young people like this we need to mentor them, guide them. This is the future of this province. I'd ask my young friends Judy and Annie to please rise and be awarded the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise today and introduce to you and through you a group seated in the members' gallery today, joining us from the Academy of Learning and Digital School in Edmonton. Elmer and Audrey Brattberg are the two owners of the two schools I previously

mentioned. Charles Jarvis is an operations manager and a past graduate of the Academy of Learning. Andre Harris is the information systems manager and a past graduate of the Academy of Learning. Luke Wolff is a very successful Digital School graduate with a new career as a CAD technician, and Michael Nagy is also an Academy of Learning graduate and valedictorian with a new career as an insurance adviser. At this time I would ask all of my guests to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Deputy Premier.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great honour to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly members of the Council of Alberta University Students, or CAUS, representing over 70,000 undergraduate students at the University of Alberta, the University of Calgary, and the University of Lethbridge. They're meeting with many members of the Assembly all week. They are seated in the public gallery this afternoon. I'd ask that each rise as I call their name to receive the warm welcome of the Assembly. They are Beverly Eastham, who is finishing her second and final term as VP external of the U of A Students' Union and as chair of CAUS; Kay She, the outgoing VP external of the U of C Students' Union and vice-chair of CAUS; Zach Fentiman, president of the U of A Students' Union; Jeremy Girard, the outgoing president at the U of L Students' Union; Alex Massé, VP academic at the U of L Students' Union; Hardave Birk, the newly elected VP external at the U of C Students' Union; Duncan Wojtaszek, the executive director of the Council of Alberta University Students; Taz Kassam, newly elected president at the University of Lethbridge Students' Union; and River Walton, external commissioner of the University of Calgary Students' Union. They are all standing in the public gallery, Mr. Speaker. I'd ask that we to give them the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Members' Statements

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

Academy of Learning and Digital School

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On Friday, February 26, I had the honour and privilege of taking part in the graduation ceremony of the Academy of Learning and Digital School. The Academy of Learning is a career and business college with over 30 fully licensed diploma programs, all under one year in length, training individuals to enter the workforce upon graduation. Their programs generally fall under the categories of office administration, health care, accounting, and information technology. The Digital School is also a career college, specializing in one-year-or-less diploma programs for computer-aided drafting engineering. Graduates from these schools are mostly mature students who opted to return to school to get the postsecondary education that they need to qualify for more lucrative careers.

Mr. Speaker, these schools have seen tremendous success over the years, boasting a consistent employment rate of 90 per cent from immediate graduates. In addition, the Academy of Learning has been a proud recipient of consumers' choice awards for business schools for the past eight years both in Calgary and Edmonton. Congratulations to the dedicated employees who have helped to make the Academy of Learning and Digital School a successful and important aspect of Alberta's education, and congratulations to the

students who have taken these important steps to improve their futures.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Kevin Koe Rink Brier Championship

Mr. Drysdale: Mr. Speaker, I'm so proud to rise today to celebrate the tremendous performance of Alberta's Kevin Koe rink as the 2010 Tim Hortons Brier champions. Yesterday evening in a thrilling final Kevin Koe's last shot was right on the button, giving him a 6-5 extra-end victory over Ontario's Glenn Howard and making him Brier champion for the very first time.

For more than a decade Kevin Koe's rink honed their skills in the shadows of better known Edmonton rinks skipped by Randy Ferbey and Kevin Martin. Ferbey and Martin not only competed and advanced in the same local playdowns but between them won a total of eight Briers for Alberta.

This year Koe's rink made its own mark in a brilliant fashion, culminating with the championship in his very first Brier appearance. Their path to the championship was a long road as the Koe rink had to win two playoff games against Newfoundland and Labrador and northern Ontario to advance. Now their efforts can focus on representing Canada at the world curling championships in Cortina d'Ampezzo, Italy, from April 3 to 11.

Mr. Speaker, I invite all members of this Legislature to join me in congratulating skip Kevin Koe, third Blake MacDonald, second Carter Rycroft, and lead Nolan Thiessen on their Brier championship. You have made Albertans very proud.

Thank you.

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

Calgary International Airport Development

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This administration made a grave mistake when it declined to show some genuine leadership and long-term planning with regard to the construction of the Calgary airport tunnel. The deadline for action has passed, and the project is dead or, at least, delayed. Should the tunnel ever be built, it will be far more expensive than it would have been had this administration and the federal government acted sensibly or had the Calgary Airport Authority not resisted the tunnel's construction earlier on. Once Barlow Trail is closed, Calgary will face unprecedented gridlock, commuters will be frustrated, emergency vehicles will lose precious time reaching their destinations, more carbon will be spewed into the atmosphere as cars sit idling on Deerfoot, and local businesses will suffer significant loss of revenue, which in turn will impact property values in Calgary northeast.

This administration continues to say that transportation is the key to our future, yet you have failed to see the need for the tunnel and the future LRT expansion into the International Airport. It is ironic that an administration that commissioned a well-hyped competitiveness review doesn't understand the competitive disadvantage they have imposed on Alberta's largest city and, in fact, upon the province at large. The Calgary International Airport's new runway is going to open up Calgary to the world, but the lack of a tunnel is going to create a backlog for the new influx of business travelers, air commuters, and tourists. How is that competitive?

Constituents in northeast Calgary are incensed by this administration's failure to show leadership in this matter. That anger will only increase and spread across the city as Calgary commuters are forced to live with the consequences of your failure.

On behalf of my constituents in Calgary-McCall and all of the people that depend upon efficient transportation links around the airport, I will continue to work with city of Calgary officials, aldermen, MLAs, MPs, and citizens to find a responsible solution to meet the transportation needs of Calgary-McCall.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Clean Energy Projects

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Innovation is a focal point as Alberta moves to increase competitiveness and embrace a clean energy future. The Alberta government is supporting research and innovation today to find the clean energy technologies of tomorrow. Using Alberta's nearly \$150 million allocation of the federal Ecotrust fund, we are supporting ideas that can make us more efficient and that support low- to no-emission energy.

We're funding unique projects like turning forest remnants into electricity in Drayton Valley and turning Edmonton's municipal waste into energy that will heat homes in Strathcona county. We've also invested in research in our energy sector with a \$25 million grant to the University of Alberta's partnership with the world-renowned Helmholtz Association of German Research Centres. This partnership will help address challenges facing oil sands development through research into such areas as eliminating tailings ponds.

Mr. Speaker, earlier today the Minister of Environment announced funding for another Ecotrust project. One million dollars has been granted to Enbridge and its partners for the carbon dioxide slurry pipeline project. The plan is to pump captured carbon dioxide through a pipeline to transport materials such as sulphur and limestone to markets where it can be sold. Normally a slurry pipeline uses water to propel its contents. Using carbon dioxide is a new idea that has tremendous potential. Once materials arrive, the carbon dioxide will be stored underground or used in enhanced oil recovery rather than released into the atmosphere.

Congratulations to Enbridge and its partners for challenging themselves to find new and better ways to do business, ways that demonstrate the commitment of Albertans to seek out innovation, apply technology, and improve environmental performance.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Oral Question Period

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

Competitiveness Review of Oil and Gas Industry

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The competitiveness review confirms what we all knew, that within two years of taking office this Premier succeeded in eroding trust with the energy sector and in introducing a bucketload of uncertainty to what was one of the most stable oil and gas jurisdictions in the world. The effect was a less competitive oil and gas industry. To the Premier: given this government's track record for changing royalties again and again and again, what assurance can the Premier give that this time will be different and that this time he'll stick with it?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the changes that were introduced in terms of the drilling incentive and some of the other changes recently were in reaction to an ever-changing market, new finds of shale gas, and also to deal with the credit crisis and partly, of course, the economic recession. This last competitiveness review was done

with months of consultation with the industry and having that information analyzed and the recommendations coming forward to government.

1:50

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since this competitiveness review doesn't actually speak to Alberta having to have one of the three lowest combined royalty and tax rates compared to similar jurisdictions – this is to the Premier again – does performance measure 1(a) in this year's Energy ministry business plan, which says just that, still hold?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the changes following the competitiveness review are to put jobs back in Alberta, whether it's the local tire shop, to put people back in motels across rural Alberta, and also to keep creating more jobs well into the future. Again, a third party analyzed the report and said that this is building a \$2.5 trillion business over the next 10 years.

Mr. Taylor: Well, Mr. Speaker, so far two questions and no answers. I'll try this again. How does the Premier intend to prevent his government's new focus on competitive royalties and resource revenues from becoming just a race to the bottom?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the competitiveness review analyzed all information coming forward in terms of the new geological data that's out there: shale gas available not only in the United States but in B.C., Saskatchewan, and Alberta, some of the cardium plays for oil. Of course, this is about introducing innovation and also new technology, new technology that will significantly reduce the environmental footprint the oil industry has put on Alberta.

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

Oil and Gas Royalties

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll try my luck with the Minister of Energy this time, and maybe I'll get some answers this time. Maybe. While this report is four months late, it still remains short on details. To the minister: since the new royalty curves weren't done when you released this review last Thursday, why weren't they ready, and who's designing them?

Mr. Liepert: Well, I would like to correct the preamble, as generally is the case. There were a number of initiatives that were announced last Thursday. What we did say, however, Mr. Speaker, was that we did want to get the report and the response to it out so that industry could make its decisions regarding investment. We wanted to also ensure, because of the situation involving natural gas and the low prices for natural gas, that we take a further look at, as the member said, the royalty curves. We're not expecting significant changes, but we did want to have the extra 60 days to do that.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, when we consulted with industry, they were not opposed to paying higher royalties when prices were high, so what is the minister's rationale for lowering the maximum for oil by 10 per cent and the maximum for natural gas by 14 per cent?

Mr. Liepert: Well, I can't comment on the consultations that the Official Opposition had with industry, but if that was what they were told by industry, we were told differently, Mr. Speaker. We were clearly told that, especially in the area with the new deposits in shale gas, there's huge investment up front, there's high risk that's being taken, and the high end of the curve, which was previously at 50 per cent, simply did not make the risk viable. We've made those adjustments, and they've been well received, I would say.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since conditions change and since there's nothing in the competitiveness review about how this government would review royalties in the future, what is the minister going to do, if there is a need to make changes, that doesn't throw the industry back into turmoil? Do you have a process in place?

Mr. Liepert: Well, yes, we do, Mr. Speaker. The process we outlined very clearly was that it would be the process that we've gone through for the last year, which is consultative, collaborative, and working together. We have huge challenges outside our province. With our province being under attack, we need to ensure that as Albertans we are working together, that we trust one another, and I think the announcements of last week will go a long way to rebuilding that trust as Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar with the third Official Opposition main question.

Construction and Manufacturing Outsourcing

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta was the only province with a notable job loss in February. We lost 14,800 jobs last month. My first question is to the Premier. Why are we exporting so many construction and steel fabrication jobs to places like South Korea when the unemployment rate for the construction sector here in this province is increasing?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, while it's certainly disappointing to see the unemployment increases here in the province of Alberta, over the long term we're going to see the economy pick up and the number of people without a job diminish. Even though the numbers are up, we still have the third highest employment rates in the country of Canada. But to this government even one person that's without a job is serious, and we want to get all people back to work.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: given that 200 very large production modules for Imperial Oil's Kearn oil sands project will be shipped from South Korea to Portland, Oregon, then moved by barge up the Columbia and Snake rivers, that from there they will be trucked slowly through Idaho, Montana, and Alberta to the Kearn oil sands project, how many jobs were created in South Korea as the result of this bad deal for Alberta, and how many jobs were lost here in this province in the construction industry?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, that's why the competitiveness review is so important, to make sure that we compete with other countries. There has been a huge global economic shift. Countries are competing not only for contracts. They're competing for investment, and they're also competing for people. That's why, I believe,

the opposition will support this government in the Competitiveness Act, Bill 1, and get the process moving as quickly as possible.

Mr. MacDonald: Again, Mr. Speaker, it's difficult to compete when this government is selling out the industry.

Now, given that the people of Alberta have provided generous royalty and tax concessions to Imperial Oil for the Kearn oil sands project, how does this deal between South Korea and Imperial Oil benefit the steel fabrication and construction and manufacturing industries in this province, which are suffering through such very difficult times?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, that's just the issue here: why is it that other countries can compete with industries in the country of Canada and provide the necessary equipment and some of the large vessels that the oil and gas expansion in the oil sands requires? That is why we want to go through the whole regulatory process – the review, the competitiveness – to reposition Alberta to make sure that we can compete.

Provincial Deficit

Mr. Anderson: Last Thursday the government reversed course and adopted many of the Wildrose proposals on energy competitiveness. Let's hope they do the same with the province's finances. On Sunday Frank Atkins, a well-respected economist, and Marcel Latouche of the Institute for Public Sector Accountability released their findings that the true size of this year's provincial deficit is not the government's claimed \$4.7 billion. It is, in fact, \$7.6 billion. Sound familiar? To the Premier: will he admit that this year's true cash deficit is \$7.6 billion?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance and Enterprise will take the next two questions, but in all honesty we have the best books in the country of Canada. Nothing is hidden in our reporting. Everything is reported by law on a quarterly basis. There is no jurisdiction in Canada that has the same legislation that Alberta follows.

Mr. Anderson: So the experts are wrong again, I see.

To the Premier: will he accept the recommendations of Atkins and Latouche to annually report the true cash deficit this government is running instead of massaging the numbers to "obfuscate how much of a spending hole they have actually dug themselves into"?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I'd remind the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere that what professors Atkins and Latouche actually said in referring to our budget was, "Of course, this is following accepted standard accounting principles." If we hadn't followed accepted standard accounting principles, I think we would have heard about that, too.

Mr. Anderson: The professors clearly stated that they were hiding the numbers. That is what the professors said in the report.

To the Premier. Perhaps he could explain to this House how the reported deficit is \$4.7 billion when Budget 2010 projects \$6.8 billion being withdrawn from the sustainability fund and over a billion dollars more added in new debt. That's \$7.8 billion in total deficit financing. It just doesn't add up.

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, as the Premier has already indicated, precisely the fact that our books are as clear and as transparent as they are is why you're able to put these things together, as these two

professors did. Let me quote from the TD Economics analysis of the budget, where they say, “The accounting of a provincial government’s capital plan rightly splits outlays into ‘capital investment’ and ‘expenses for capital purposes’” and that capital investment is rightly excluded as an expenditure. I’d be happy to table this.

2:00 Competitiveness Review of Oil and Gas Industry (continued)

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, it’s halfway through this government’s first term in office, and they’re in retreat on all fronts: first, a reversal on health care reform and now a flip-flop on oil and gas royalties. Over two years have gone by, and Albertans are wondering what, if anything, this government has actually accomplished. My question is to the Premier. Why has the Premier sold out Albertans by reversing his commitment to higher royalties on oil and gas?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, as I said before, we are as a government going through a complete competitiveness review. We started with the oil and gas sector. We are going to include agriculture, small business, and forestry because we’ve got to make sure that we reposition the province of Alberta given the huge global economic shift that we just experienced. We’re going to come out of it stronger than ever, and we are going to lead this country of Canada out of this recession.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Premier’s royalty framework was supposed to accommodate lower prices as well as higher ones, why won’t the Premier simply admit that his weak and vacillating government has once again caved in to pressure from the oil and gas industry?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, what we’ve done is exactly reflecting the current issue at hand, and that is that since the first royalty framework was introduced, there has been a major shift. We have large, large finds of shale gas, and a new technology that, quite frankly, was developed here in Alberta, is being applied in other jurisdictions. We have thousands of trillions of cubic feet of gas now available. A lot of that gas is very close to the markets, our traditional markets. The other is that we have an opportunity to improve innovation and technology so that we reduce the footprint on the face of Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Given that a recent poll shows that a majority of Albertans did not want the royalties to be cut and a substantial group of Albertans actually wanted them to be increased, why won’t the Premier admit that what his government has done is not in the public interest but is, in fact, a huge retreat in the face of political pressure from special interests?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, this is all about doing what’s right. As I said in Calgary on Thursday, you don’t get paid royalties on the resource that’s in the ground. This is one way of extracting the resource and finding the balance.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

Environmental Monitoring and Reporting

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I don’t believe that Alberta currently has a perfect balance between oil and gas development and environmental protection. The problem is that when it comes to environmental regulations, this government has a terrible track record, and while the competitiveness review does recognize and talk about environmental protection, I don’t see anything in here that clearly defines and prioritizes action. To the Minister of the Environment: what was the minister’s part in this review?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, this review was an effort that was a partnership between independent third parties, industry, and government, and by government I refer to the Department of Energy, the Treasury Board, Environment. Who else was involved? Technology was involved in the review. SRD was involved in the review. The role of Environment was to work with other ministries and identify areas where there is overlap, where there is duplication, and where we can streamline a process but at the end of the day protect the environment.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. To the same minister: how exactly will the minister streamline the review process for environmental assessments? What has been lined up so far?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, the competitiveness review talks about a group that will be chaired by the Member for Drayton Valley-Calmor, the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Energy. The parliamentary assistants from Environment and SRD will also be involved in this. They will be in fact working with officials within those industries to identify those. They have two objectives, short term and longer term, and we expect the report back from them very shortly.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Can the minister explain what it means for environmental monitoring when the report states on page 17: “Stakeholders have also raised concerns about duplicative and overly frequent reporting requirements”? What exactly does that mean?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, as you’re well aware, there are a number of jurisdictions that have responsibility for the oil and gas industry: the ERCB, SRD, and Environment. In some cases industry finds itself reporting the identically same data to all three regulators. It makes sense that they should only have to report that data once. Maybe the government could talk to itself rather than industry talking three times.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Competitiveness Review Impact on Employment

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Lots of talk today about the past in the oil patch. Everyone can be an expert on items in the past. My questions are to the Minister of Energy. What are you going to do in the future? What are you going to do now for my constituents in Whitecourt-Ste. Anne to get them back to work?

Mr. Liepert: Well, as always, Mr. Speaker, the toughest questions come from the Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne. You know, it's not government that gets people back to work; it's the private sector that gets people back to work. What government needs to do is create an environment whereby the private sector will invest in this province because there's an opportunity to succeed. We estimate, based on some of the projections that we've made, that it could be as many as 8,000 jobs created as a result of some of the announcements of last week. I'm sure that some of those jobs will be in that member's constituency.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given your commitment to private enterprise what are you going to do to allow them to use the emerging technology to build this oil field and build this province again? When are you going to allow them to get to work?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, the member is absolutely right. You know, a lot has been made by members of this House relative to changes in the fiscal regime, but I think the announcement last week was much broader than that. It relates to changes that we need to make around regulatory streamlining. Maybe as importantly as some of the changes, as the Premier mentioned earlier, we have new deposits not only in shale gas but in oil as well where technology is required, and we need to ensure that we are flexible in order to deploy that technology.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Being flexible, my next question is to the minister of finance. What's the finance community going to do to allow this industry to grow and to prosper?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, energy revenues into this province come through three streams. There's the royalty stream, there's the tax stream, and there's the land sales stream. What we're going to do, very clearly, is that we're going to grow two by temporarily shrinking the royalty stream. It's going to attract investment. More money is going to come into this province. We're going to grow those quadrants of the pie. Overall the pie will keep growing. You're going to see 8,000 jobs next year and 13,000 jobs in the years after.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Farm Worker Safety

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the last reported year there were 23 farm-related deaths and 757 injuries that required ER visits. While this government supports farm safety education programs, there has been no noticeable decline in the farm injuries or deaths, and paid farm workers continue to be excluded from the Alberta Occupational Health and Safety Act and aren't covered under workmen's comp. To the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. A year ago the minister was consulting with the agricultural sector on farm safety. When will the farm safety report . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We ran out of time for the full question, but with respect to the issue of farm safety, we are

concentrating on reducing fatalities and injuries rather than regulating and legislating what takes place there to the point that this morning I made an announcement that \$715,000 is being invested through ag societies throughout the province to put on farm safety seminars and education seminars in order to make it a safer environment for people to work. So our commitment is there.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to ask the same question in a year and see if that extra money has really helped.

To the Minister of Employment and Immigration: when will you be introducing legislation amending the Occupational Health and Safety Act to protect the health and safety of paid farm workers, as was recommended by a provincial judge over two years ago?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development has clearly indicated that both his ministry and the Department of Employment and Immigration are committed to farmer safety. Indeed, there is a report that in due course the minister may be receiving. It's that ministry that takes the lead on it. But in the meantime I am of the firm opinion that I'd rather prevent accidents from happening in the first place than deal with their consequences. That's what both of the ministries are committed to right now.

2:10

Ms Pastoor: Well, that was a nice answer, but I'm not sure that it really was the one that would match my question.

Why does the minister continue to exclude paid farm workers from workers' comp coverage? What is the rationale behind that decision?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, work environment on a farm obviously differs a great deal from that in any industrial setting. A farm is also a place where people actually live and raise children, and it's a community, so applying strict industrial standards to a farm setting is not exactly comparable. But there are reports that we are looking at. You must appreciate the fact that both the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development and I had a chance yesterday to take a fresh look at it. Wait and see what we shall do.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Competitiveness Review Impact on Employment

(continued)

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are to the Minister of Energy. In constituencies like Strathmore-Brooks we don't have the big corporate head offices; however, we do have numerous oil companies that provide employment and know the importance of investment in this industry. When will service companies in southern Alberta see a positive boost or see a return to busier times as a result of this competitiveness review?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned in my previous answers, what government does is create the environment for investment. You know, one of the things that has happened over the past year was that we have brought forward interim measures that have in fact actually got many of the companies that the member refers to back in business. What last week did was make those

programs permanent so that the investment community could look at Alberta with some predictability into the future.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. We hear a lot about how the Alberta royalty framework caused so much of the downward spiral in the oil and gas industry, but we also know there was significant downward pressure impact from the global recession. How is the competitiveness review going to move this industry forward in the face of continued global recession, and how are those two factors connected?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member is absolutely correct. You know, nobody, including the critics who sit in the right-field bleachers, could have predicted the global recession that we had and certainly not gas prices at \$4 and \$5. Even with the changes that were announced last week, it is going to continue to present a challenge to our industry. But I believe that the history of our industry in this province is one of resilience, and they will persevere.

Mr. Doerksen: Again to the Minister of Energy. Although the competitiveness review is trying to place Alberta in a more favourable position, our neighbouring provinces have surged ahead in attracting investment and even offer a royalty holiday, for example in Saskatchewan. How do we compete with that, and what are our tactics to ensure that we succeed?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, there's more to competitiveness than just royalties. I mean, Alberta enjoys a number of advantages over some of our neighbouring provinces, like no sales tax, like lowest personal and corporate income tax. Also, we have an infrastructure into our resource fields that is second to none. I saw last week where the British Columbia government had to in fact put in an incentive so oil companies could actually build roads into the northeast shield gas plays. However, as I said earlier, it is Albertans that will benefit as a result of what we announced last week.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Activity-based Funding Model for Hospital Care

Dr. Taft: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. Activity-based funding is a new funding model that Alberta Health Services is going to implement across the province. The reported plan is that it will be implemented for continuing care facilities starting April 1, 2010, just a couple of weeks from now. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Is the drive to activity-based funding being led under the Alberta Health Services superboard or under the Department of Health and Wellness?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, there are a number of funding models out there which hon. members here would be familiar with. One of them is block funding, or global funding, which is where we're coming from. Another one, which we're moving a little bit toward in this case, is called activity-based funding, and I think it warrants even further discussion. It's basically based on volume and on type of service. To my knowledge it's primarily Alberta Health Services that is pursuing this, with the intended first target group being long-term care.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. According to the organization chart of the Alberta Health Services superboard – this chart was just updated a couple of weeks ago – the lead position for activity-based funding for continuing care is vacant. Apparently, no one is going to run this new funding model. Is the minister aware of this?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, what I am aware of is that the board and its CEO, Dr. Duckett, are looking at this matter and hoping to start that particular process as part of the five-year funding plan. Now, if that's different than what I understand it to be, then we'll clear that up in a hurry, I'm sure.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Thanks. Given that five of the six positions for activity-based funding under Alberta Health Services are vacant, how can this minister have confidence that Dr. Duckett or the board is going to begin ramping this up? How do they have any capacity to run this system?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, you don't recruit people to those kinds of senior positions overnight. It takes some time, it takes some doing, and there are processes and protocols to be followed. Secondly, now that we know that we have a secure, stable, and predictable funding plan coming very soon, that too will help take some pressures off the system and allow for better planning going forward.

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

Royalties for Unconventional Oil

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you well know, the oil sands are an important resource, a resource that has resulted in an unprecedented investment, an important driver of the economy in Lesser Slave Lake, so I was so pleased when the government announced the findings of its conventional oil and natural gas competitiveness review as well as the necessary steps to position Alberta as one of the most competitive North American destinations for energy investment. To the Minister of Energy: why didn't the review also address the competitiveness of Alberta's important oil sands resource?

Mr. Liepert: Well, I guess, two reasons, Mr. Speaker. First of all, the oil sands in Alberta really don't have a lot of significant competition worldwide. We would say that the new royalty framework that was introduced a year ago or so has actually worked very well relative to the oil sands because as you will recall, there were a lot of issues around the 1 per cent royalty rate in the oil sands. That has actually turned around now. As a result of the new royalty framework the revenue to the province actually now exceeds natural gas.

Ms Calahasen: How can the minister then be sure that the oil sands royalties are hitting the sweet spot? I know about sweet spots.

Mr. Liepert: Well, I'm not sure of the definition of sweet spot, but I will say, Mr. Speaker, that one of the things that the government will realize at the end of this fiscal year is a significant increase primarily for two reasons. One is that bitumen prices internationally have risen dramatically, thereby higher royalties to the province, but also production has increased significantly more than anticipated in both oil sands and in situ. Those are all very positive factors.

Ms Calahasen: To the same minister. Oil sands still face regulatory hurdles. Will the minister please tell me: will the regulatory review be looked at in the future at all?

Mr. Liepert: Well, the member raised a very good question, Mr. Speaker. While the competitiveness review was about conventional and unconventional oil and natural gas, the work that we're going to be starting relative to streamlining the regulatory process will include oil sands and in situ as well because there are a number of hurdles and barriers that were put up that have built up over the years, and we want to ensure that it's as efficient to do business in all sectors of the oil industry in this province.

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

Centralized Cytology Lab Services

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government continues to create the problems and start the fires and then claim how wonderful they are after they put them out and say: we're here to save you. Alberta Health Services disbanded the council of lab leaders. Is the minister of health aware of the reports submitted by the pathologists in the southern zone of AHS on their request for the proposal?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the important thing here is that cytology services will continue to be provided. In fact, there are some new and improved methods of doing that. What we're talking about is the analysis part, not the actual treatment or testing part. It's the analysis part that's being consolidated. All of southern Alberta is going to be done now in Calgary, and that's what he's referring to. That should provide for faster results and more expedient results.

2:20

Mr. Hinman: Mr. Speaker, they're undermining our future.

Does the minister feel that pathologists and cytologists of the southern zone are wrong in their concerns on lowering quality assurance, loss of expertise, as well as no correlation plan for future biopsies and treatments in the local areas?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the intention is to actually provide faster access to the results of those tests. That's part of what Health Services is trying to do, a faster turnaround time to get the results back and also at a lower cost, which I know the hon. member would likely support.

Mr. Hinman: Yes, and some of those reports are very much questioning whether it will lower the cost.

Will the minister do the right thing and return the decision-making to the local level and to those who are competent to make the decisions concerning quality and efficient health care?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I can assure this member as I can assure all members in this House and all Albertans that nothing will ever be done that compromises in any way patient safety, patient quality. In fact, quite the opposite: we're working hard to improve where we can and to provide faster, better, more solid services province-wide.

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

Swan Hills Treatment Centre

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week I asked the Minister of Infrastructure when the review of the Swan Hills treatment plant will be released. All I got was data on PCBs, so I'm going to try again. To the Minister of Infrastructure: why has it taken a year for the minister to assess "what the assessment is saying"?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, let me be very clear again that the Swan Hills Treatment Centre has done an excellent job in treating the hazardous waste of this province. I want to say to you as well that every five years we do an assessment of that treatment plant to see what the future of that plant should be, and that is in the process. We are reviewing not only what is taking place in Alberta but what the needs of Albertans are and what the needs of industry are as far as the plant is concerned. It is a very much-needed plant at this time.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the minister again. The minister keeps on saying: we are assessing; we are assessing. When will the minister stop the secrecy surrounding Swan Hills and release this report?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure exactly what the hon. member expects us to do. I want to say to you that it is very important to assess. It is very important to look at what is necessary for the future direction of this province. This government is not going to stand up and say, "Yes, we're going to do this," and then backtrack in a different direction. It is clearly important that the direction that is taken is a well-thought-out focus.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the minister should get off his assessment and provide some action. This treatment plant cost \$22 million to run last year. Albertans want a government that is accountable. So why won't the minister release the review?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, that's exactly what this government is: accountable for what we are doing. It is in our budget. It is in our focus of what is important in the Swan Hills treatment plant. The review is there. We are looking at it; we are assessing what is necessary. I will reiterate again the importance of the plant and the importance of Swan Hills, looking at it as a utility and not as a profit-making institution.

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

Private Postsecondary Institutions

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We have heard a great deal over the recent weeks about the government's tuition caps for universities and colleges. To the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology: does the tuition cap apply to the private institutions like CDI or DeVry or Academy of Learning, for that matter?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. No. The answer is that our tuition fee policy applies only to public institutions. Private institutions are governed under a separate act. They provide

different options than our publicly funded institutions. For some students these institutions offer quick, employment-ready kind of training and provide very focused options for students. It's all about choice.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Back to the same minister: does the government provide private postsecondary institutions any operational funds?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, again the answer is no. The over 150 private vocational colleges in Alberta do not receive government operational grants like we provide to the universities and colleges or Campus Alberta. However, we do provide financial assistance to students attending private schools in a lot of cases.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental to the same minister: what role does your ministry play in relation to these private schools?

Mr. Horner: It's a good question, Mr. Speaker, given the funding questions previously. Our role, really, is to ensure that programs offered by private vocational institutions comply with the Private Vocational Training Act. The primary objective of the act is to provide a measure of consumer protection for students that are enrolled in these licensed private vocational training programs. So we review and approve and license the programs of those private vocational providers. We have over 800 licensed programs at the 150 institutions in the province.

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

Funding for Private Schools

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Unlike their public school counterparts, private schools and religious charter schools exclude students by charging tuition or by applying faith-based restrictions. Recently MLAs were recipients of a letter dated February 12, 2010, from Don Zech, public board chair of Palliser regional schools in which he suggests, "The timing is indeed ripe for a discussion about formerly private schools joining the public system as alternative programs." To the minister: does the minister not see this as a case of private schools not only wanting to have their private pudding but eating our public's, too?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, when a private school decides to fold its tent and join the public system as an alternative program, it becomes part of the public system.

Mr. Chase: Does the minister agree with the chairman's justification that "the full instructional grant does, however, help them offer competitive wages and benefits so they can hire the best teachers for the job at hand"?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Yes, Mr. Speaker. When a private school joins the public system, becomes an alternative program under the public system, it becomes part of the public system. In that case, the public

board becomes responsible for the educational opportunities there, responsible for the quality of instruction there, responsible for reporting to the public with respect to the results there. That's a very good thing in many circumstances. Those that choose not to join the public system continue to be responsible in their own way for the funds that are being provided. But when the private school joins the public system, they become public.

Mr. Chase: And they continue to charge tuition while getting full per-pupil funding.

Given that the underlying principle of public schools is inclusion regardless of culture, creed, ability, or economic status, why is the minister permitting "faith-based alternative programs" to hide under the public school banner and receive full per-pupil, taxpayer-funded instructional grants?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm astonished at this hon. member. Normally he's suggesting that we shouldn't be having private schools, that we should be having just a public system. What we have in Alberta is a very strong education system because there's a lot of choice. That choice is very extant in the public system in Alberta. Faith-based alternatives in the public system are working very, very well in Edmonton and Calgary and right across the province.

Where the hon. member goes wrong is when he suggests that you can still charge a tuition fee to somebody who's attending a public school. That's not on in Alberta.

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

Alberta Schools Alternative Procurement Program

Mr. Benito: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are paying interest on top of the principal on the first ASAP project, which will provide 18 new schools in Edmonton and Calgary by September 2010. To the Minister of Education: is our government actually saving any money over the 30 years of this agreement?

Mr. Hancock: Well, absolutely, Mr. Speaker. Independent third-party studies by PricewaterhouseCoopers demonstrate that the first phase of our design, build, finance, and maintain K to 9 schools will actually yield a cost savings of \$97 million over the traditional build approach. Similar net present value analysis demonstrates that our design build bundle for the four ASAP 2 high schools will save us \$40 million. We anticipate similar savings for the other ASAP 2 schools. The bottom line is that we wouldn't proceed with building under a P3 unless it was a better deal for Albertans.

Mr. Benito: To the same minister: given the current economic climate is there any possibility that some of the planned projects under ASAP 2 might be cancelled or deferred?

2:30

Mr. Hancock: No, Mr. Speaker. In fact, the current economic climate makes it better for building. The prices are better, the cost savings are better on the various capital projects. We have committed to Albertans that we'll build the 14 new schools in time for the 2012-2013 school year, and we will deliver on that commitment. The contract for the four new high schools has been let, and those are actually starting construction as we speak. With respect to the balance of it the bid process has closed. I can tell you that the results are good. I can't tell you those results because there's a time frame to work out the agreement with the successful contractor.

Mr. Benito: To the Minister of Infrastructure: given that these schools are being built as a P3 project, what assurances can the minister give that they will be completed on time and on budget and, more importantly, that quality will not be sacrificed in order to achieve cost savings?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I do want to assure everyone that ASAP 2 is on time and on budget. The schools are 80 per cent complete and will be delivered by June 30. The contract includes a penalty clause for completion date. Quality is this government's number one priority, and this is in the contract as well. The standards, designs ensure high quality and equality across the province, and there's a 30-year warranty that guarantees that quality is maintained and also ensures the use of the best material and innovation practices.

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

School Closures

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Waves of potential school closures are washing over communities in Edmonton and Calgary, but this government is looking the other way, claiming that the decisions are for the school boards to make. The truth is that, yes, city core neighbourhoods are losing students to the suburbs, but provincial policies are making the situation worse. To the minister: how are municipalities supposed to keep families in the city core when this government has a utilization policy that pushes schools out of these neighbourhoods?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, under the Municipal Government Act when municipalities plan for their future neighbourhoods, they're requested to consult with school boards serving those neighbourhoods to plan appropriately. One would suggest that that type of consultation and process should also work with respect to the redevelopment of area structure plans in the inner-city neighbourhoods or the areas that are not in the suburbs. That type of consultation has to work between local governments because local governments, the municipalities and the school boards, are the ones that know what's in the best interests of their communities and for their students.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. The utilization formula is out of sync with the Learning Commission's class size recommendations. One of the Minister of Education's predecessors conceded five years ago that there were problems with the utilization policy. Why is the minister still standing idly by while outdated bureaucratic formulas are being used to hurt communities in Calgary and Edmonton, perhaps permanently?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, what's outdated is this member's understanding of how we do capital. In fact, utilization is a very minor part of the capital formula with respect to where new capital is allocated and how modernizations occur. What's most important is the health and safety of students. What's next important is the need for spaces in places where students live. Those are the things which go into the question of where we allocate capital. I'd like to say that there's enough capital to do everything we need all at once, but there isn't, so it's very important for school boards to use their

infrastructure in the most effective way possible so that all of their students have a good educational opportunity.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. The first schools to close are the big ones, whose hallways are considered instructional spaces. Infrastructure grants were tied to student enrolment five years ago, a change that also punishes schools the moment students begin to flow out of the . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member. Please, please, please. Remember, you signed the paper. No preambles. You signed the paper.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I will use that in the future, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: No. Now. Get to the question.

Mr. Chase: Will the Minister of Infrastructure re-examine this policy before it accelerates the decline of city core neighbourhoods in our major cities?

The Speaker: Perfect.

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, school boards should and school boards are making appropriate decisions with respect to where the schools are and what resources they need for their students. I would say that it's very irresponsible to suggest that a school board is closing a needed school because the hallways are too wide. That would be ridiculous, and I don't believe it's happening.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Country of Origin Labelling

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many of my constituents are livestock producers, and I continue to hear their concerns about the U.S. mandatory country of origin labelling issue and its negative impact on our producers. I understand that there was a recent meeting in Washington: the Council of the Federation, elected officials from the provinces along with Ambassador Doer and Tom Vilsack, the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture. My first question is for the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations. Was there an opportunity at this meeting to discuss the negative impact of this mandatory labelling policy, and do you sense any possibility of movement by the Americans?

Ms Evans: It's a very good question, Mr. Speaker. No, I don't sense any movement at all. It was an excellent meeting on a Sunday morning for an hour and a quarter, 90 per cent of which was consumed by talking about the impact on both sides of the border, not only to our agricultural producers but to producers south of the line. The Secretary of Agriculture indicated to us that this Congress was not prepared to move on the country of origin labelling. We're hoping that we'll be able to, through our Minister of Agriculture . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Olson: My first supplemental is for the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. I've heard talk about a Canadian WTO trade challenge on this issue. Can you advise us of the status, please?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The World Trade Organization is in the process now of selecting the members for the dispute settlement panel that's going to judge this. I think that it's worth noting that Mexico has also initiated a challenge to the same rule, and the panel will hear both cases. I believe that that's going to be helpful, that two countries are actually challenging this as a violation to the North American free trade agreement that we've been operating under.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Olson: Thank you. For the same minister: what are we doing to help our producers compete in this difficult economic climate – I mean, over and above the challenge – and importantly, what kind of input are we getting from our producers?

Mr. Hayden: Mr. Speaker, I think that this challenge and the situation that we face now points out more than we've ever seen before that we cannot rely solely on the American market for trade and that our priorities need to be focused in other directions. I mean, we need more trade with Asia and many other markets. We also, I believe, can improve dramatically our domestic markets, and I think, even though it's voluntary now, that I would like to encourage Canadian retailers to actually advertise the fact that they have Canadian products on their shelves. Because of the quality we produce, I think Canadians would prefer to buy Canadian.

English Bay Provincial Recreation Area

Mrs. Leskiw: The campground and boat launch at the English Bay recreation area have been closed for almost three years now due to archaeological work taking place on the site. While the boat launch reopened in the fall of 2009, the campground facility remained closed. A constituent of mine visited English Bay several weeks ago and was not able to access because of the blocked entrance. My question is to the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation. If the boat launch is open, why are my constituents still unable to access it?

Mrs. Ady: Well, hon. member, I'm happy to report to you that staff has assured me that the boat launch is now open. They will still find some barricades around the recreation area because we're getting ready, as you know, for a campground redevelopment. I am happy to say that the archaeological work is complete, and the boat ramp is open.

Mrs. Leskiw: My next question is to the same minister. Since the archaeological work is finished and the boat launch has been opened, why does the campground still remain closed?

Mrs. Ady: Well, hon. member, we're in consultation right now. We're redeveloping the campground. It's going to have, like, 185 new stalls – there are going to be new ones that will allow for the larger recreation units that you have today – trails, and a lot of things. It's under consultation right now as to what that should look like.

Mrs. Leskiw: That's really great to hear.

My last question is also to the same minister. How long will it take to redevelop the English Bay campgrounds, and when can my constituents expect to see it open to the public and enjoy it?

Mrs. Ady: Well, we're hoping to have those consultations completed by April, so stayed tuned. We think we're going to begin that redevelopment this spring.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 114 questions and responses today. Nineteen members were recognized. Of the 19, nine were members of the Official Opposition, two of the Wildrose, one of the ND, and seven government members.

Very briefly we'll continue with our Routine and Members' Statements, but first of all, one update. To the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake. You were instructed by the Assembly last Thursday to do something today. Have you fulfilled your direction?

2:40

Home-baked Pies for MLAs

Ms Calahasen: Mr. Speaker, I've had many challenges in my political life, and I've usually come out pretty good. On Thursday you challenged me to accomplish a task, a difficult one, yes. Well, I've done almost exactly what the House had asked. I've delivered a pie for every MLA in the Legislature, but because of our strict rules I was unable to get some of the orders that were given – cream, lemon, or flapper pies – because we are not able to transport them that far without having them in a cooler. I would like everyone to have a taste of the home-baked pies, and I'd ask the hon. members here to help me change those regulations so that they are more friendly for our home cooks and our home-baked goods.

The Speaker: Where do the members obtain these pies that you've brought in?

Ms Calahasen: Mr. Speaker, they're in their respective areas, so you can pick your pie up.

The Speaker: We'll proceed in 15 seconds.

Members' Statements

(continued)

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

Foster Care

Mr. Benito: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am excited and honoured to rise today to speak about Alberta's caring and dedicated foster parents. Thousands of children and youth in provincial government care, who often face significant challenges in their lives as a result of being abused or neglected, benefit each year from the love, guidance, and support of these devoted Albertans.

I have heard comments in the past from some hon. members about the training and screening of foster parents and potential foster parents. This is something that is very personal to me and my family. As some of you may know, my wife and I are considering becoming foster parents ourselves. We have already taken part in the initial training required for all foster parents, and I can personally attest to how extensive the training is. Every person who is even considering becoming a foster parent must take eight 3-hour sessions of orientation training. Topics include child development, special needs of children in care, and the duties and responsibilities of foster parents.

All new foster parents must also take additional training covering topics such as guiding the behaviours of children, maintaining a child's culture, and working co-operatively with the birth family. As part of this screening process potential foster parents have to successfully complete a criminal record check, child intervention check, and provide three personal references and a medical reference.

In addition, a qualified professional, usually a registered social worker, assesses the family's dynamics and suitability to parent through a safe home study. Only after potential foster parents have

been fully trained, screened, and licensed can foster children be placed in their home. After that, additional training and monitoring takes place. Mr. Speaker, the training and screening process for all foster parents is extensive and rigorous, as it should be.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Capital Region Board

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to bring attention to the long-range plan that will help ensure the continued strength and sustainability of Alberta's capital region. Two years ago our Premier made the decision to create the Capital Region Board and task it with creating a long-range growth plan. The mandate for the 25 municipalities was to formulate a plan to deal with the four areas: regional transit, regional land-use planning, a regional geographic information system, and a regional housing plan.

Mr. Speaker, having a strong, co-ordinated, long-range growth plan is in the best interest of all residents within the metro area. Everyone benefits when you eliminate duplication, plan for essential infrastructure, and attract investment. The board completed its far-sighted plan in December, and now, after a provincial review, it has been approved by government. The region, which expects about 600,000 new residents over the next 40 years, has a solid plan to manage the impacts of development, promote efficient use of land, and, mostly, provide for land conservation and stewardship.

This is a tremendous opportunity to plan ahead in order to get it right, Mr. Speaker. We have seen a united group of local leaders put in a tremendous amount of work to fulfill its mandate. Heartfelt thanks for that. The government, led by Premier Stelmach, is to be commended for wanting to improve long-range planning for infrastructure and services that capital area residents need most dearly. It's about looking ahead and building upon the 21st century collaboration model that can be an example to other jurisdictions within other provinces and across Canada. Now it's time for action to capitalize on current and future economic opportunities.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Value of Oil and Gas Industry

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Minister of Energy recently announced changes that will advance Alberta's competitiveness in the upstream oil and gas sector in order to regain lost ground. These changes will ensure Alberta will be the location of choice for investors for decades to come.

After hearing from constituents ever since I was elected as the representative for Calgary-Lougheed, I understand very well the impact of oil and gas industries on the economies of our city and our province. This sector not only fuels our economy; it also defines us as innovators, entrepreneurs, and people who believe in the free market and meet challenges head on.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta's prosperity is founded on the abundance of its natural resources, and today Albertans enjoy benefits from discoveries and decisions made decades ago. Energy accounts for 30 per cent of our total GDP, and as of January 2009 Alberta's mining, oil, and gas sector was responsible for close to 150,000 direct jobs for Albertans. On top of that, almost 1 in 7 Albertans is employed in the energy sector, and it's estimated that every job in this sector is supported by two additional jobs in support industries.

Future Albertans, our children and our grandchildren, will be the benefactors of the decisions that we make today. By ensuring Alberta becomes more competitive and remains competitive, even greater rewards await the people who live and work here tomorrow. Every additional dollar invested in energy will increase by close to one and a half times, and it's expected that 8,000 more jobs will be created in 2011-12 and 13,000 more jobs annually thereafter across the economy. Over the next 25 years the Canadian Energy Research Institute estimates that conventional oil and gas development in Alberta has the potential to add \$2.5 trillion – that's with a “t” – in new economic activity.

Mr. Speaker, I look forward to seeing the improvements in Alberta's conventional oil and gas sectors and, ultimately, the continued prosperity they will bring for all of Alberta. Thank you.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts I'm pleased to table five copies of the committee's report on its 2009 activities. Additional copies of the report have also been provided for all Members of this Legislative Assembly.

Thank you.

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today. The first is on behalf of my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Riverview. This is in regard to questions the hon. member asked earlier in question period. This tabling is copies of the Alberta Health Services organizational chart dated March 4, 2010, showing five of six positions related to activity-based funding as being vacant.

My second tabling today is correspondence from an individual in Spruce Grove, Michele Ford, who is writing to all hon. Members of this Legislative Assembly, encouraging hon. members to please support Motion 504, the anaphylaxis policy that's going to be discussed after 5 o'clock this afternoon.

My last tabling is a letter I have with permission to table from Colleen McDaniel, a constituent of Edmonton-Gold Bar. It is regarding Alberta Hospital, and she is writing to encourage everyone to ensure that it remains open and viable.

Thank you.

2:50

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings. I'm tabling a letter from my constituents Robin and Jean Crawford that was sent to the Minister of Municipal Affairs requesting full disclosure of the formula/regression used to calculate their property taxes. They have been told by assessors and the manager of tax assessment north Calgary that, and I quote, the formula/regression is proprietary information and not to be released to the public. End quote. But the Crawfords believe that this provincially approved formula/regression information is essential in order to properly consider their tax assessment and that it be released.

The Speaker: Okay. This is tablings, not Ministerial Statements.

Mr. Chase: My next tabling is a copy of a letter sent to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports by Calgarian Pat Corbett, whose two sons with autism are receiving supports that help them be vital, contributing, successful, and happy members of society. Mrs. Corbett wishes to convey that impacts from what appear to be small cuts on paper make huge differences to people with disabilities and their families, and she is asking that we all be the voice for these Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, my third tabling is the letter I referenced in QP from Don Zech, chair of Palliser regional school boards, to all MLAs.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have one tabling today, five copies of an article by Frank Atkins and Marcel Latouche entitled *The True Size of the Provincial Deficit*, in which they say that the true deficit is \$7.6 billion, not \$4.7 billion, and chastise the government for not being transparent enough with their record keeping.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. First, I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of 20 postcards signed by Albertans calling on the provincial government to keep its promise to build 600 new long-term care beds. The postcards are part of a campaign sponsored by the Canadian Union of Public Employees.

The second tabling I have is the appropriate number of copies of letters from two Edmonton public school board teachers, Gordon Hepburn and Lynne Kaluzniak. Their letters describe the positive experience they've had in their classrooms recently when their class sizes were low, and Lynne Kaluzniak, in particular, discuss some very negative experiences where they were forced to teach in a classroom where the class size was well above what was recommended. They hope that funding will remain in place to prevent class sizes from increasing again.

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. Mr. Denis, Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs, responses to questions raised by Mr. Taylor, hon. Member for Calgary-Currie; Ms Notley, hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona; and Mr. Chase, hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on February 17, 2010, in the Department of Housing and Urban Affairs supplementary supply estimates.

Orders of the Day

Written Questions

[The Clerk read the following written questions, which had been accepted]

Culture and Community Spirit Consultant Costs

- Q1. Ms Blakeman:
What was the total amount spent by the Ministry of Culture and Community Spirit on external consultants during the past three fiscal years?

Environment Consultant Costs

- Q2. Ms Blakeman:
What was the total amount spent by the Ministry of Environment on external consultants during the past three fiscal years?

Advanced Education and Technology Consultant Costs

- Q3. Mr. Chase:
What was the total amount spent by the Ministry of Advanced Education and Technology on external consultants during the past three fiscal years?

Children and Youth Services Consultant Costs

- Q4. Mr. Chase:
What was the total amount spent by the Ministry of Children and Youth Services on external consultants during the past three fiscal years?

Education Consultant Costs

- Q5. Mr. Chase:
What was the total amount spent by the Ministry of Education on external consultants during the past three fiscal years?

Tourism, Parks and Recreation Consultant Costs

- Q6. Mr. Chase:
What was the total amount spent by the Ministry of Tourism, Parks and Recreation on external consultants during the past three fiscal years?

Justice Consultant Costs

- Q7. Mr. Hehr:
What was the total amount spent by the Ministry of Justice on external consultants during the past three fiscal years?

Solicitor General and Public Security Consultant Costs

- Q8. Mr. Hehr:
What was the total amount spent by the Ministry of Solicitor General and Public Security on external consultants during the past three fiscal years?

Calgary Mental Health Diversion Project

- Q9. Mr. Hehr:
What is the total number of clients dealt with by the Calgary mental health diversion project between February 4, 2008, and February 8, 2010?

Infrastructure Consultant Costs

- Q11. Mr. Kang:
What was the total amount spent by the Ministry of Infrastructure on external consultants during the past three fiscal years?

Service Alberta Consultant Costs

- Q12. Mr. Kang:
What was the total amount spent by the Ministry of Service Alberta on external consultants during the past three fiscal years?

Transportation Consultant Costs

- Q13. Mr. Kang:
What was the total amount spent by the Ministry of Transportation on external consultants during the past three fiscal years?

FOIP Information Requests

- Q14. Mr. Kang:
For each of the fiscal years 2005-2006 through 2008-2009 what percentage of requests for information under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act were met within 30 days of the initial request?

Employment and Immigration Consultant Costs

- Q15. Mr. MacDonald:
What was the total amount spent by the Ministry of Employment and Immigration on external consultants during the past three fiscal years?

Finance and Enterprise Consultant Costs

- Q16. Mr. MacDonald:
What was the total amount spent by the Ministry of Finance and Enterprise on external consultants during the past three fiscal years?

Treasury Board Consultant Costs

- Q17. Mr. MacDonald:
What was the total amount spent by the Ministry of Treasury Board on external consultants during the past three fiscal years?

Agriculture and Rural Development Consultant Costs

- Q18. Ms Pastoor:
What was the total amount spent by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development on external consultants during the past three fiscal years?

International and Intergovernmental Relations Consultant Costs

- Q19. Ms Pastoor:
What was the total amount spent by the Ministry of International and Intergovernmental Relations on external consultants during the past three fiscal years?

Seniors and Community Supports Consultant Costs

- Q20. Ms Pastoor:
What was the total amount spent by the Ministry of Seniors and Community Supports on external consultants during the past three fiscal years?

Executive Council Consultant Costs

- Q21. Dr. Swann:
What was the total amount spent by Executive Council on external consultants during the past three fiscal years?

Aboriginal Relations Consultant Costs

- Q22. Dr. Taft:
What was the total amount spent by the Ministry of Aborigi-

nal Relations on external consultants during the past three fiscal years?

Health and Wellness Consultant Costs

- Q23. Dr. Taft:
What was the total amount spent by the Ministry of Health and Wellness on external consultants during the past three fiscal years?

Zoo Standards

- Q24. Dr. Taft:
What is the total number of complaints regarding zoo standards dealt with by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development from January 1, 2003, to February 7, 2010?

Energy Consultant Costs

- Q25. Mr. Taylor:
What was the total amount spent by the Ministry of Energy on external consultants during the past three fiscal years?

Housing and Urban Affairs Consultant Costs

- Q26. Mr. Taylor:
What was the total amount spent by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs on external consultants during the past three fiscal years?

Municipal Affairs Consultant Costs

- Q28. Mr. Taylor:
What was the total amount spent by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs on external consultants during the past three fiscal years?

Education Sole-source Contracts

- Q29. Mr. Chase:
What was the total number of sole-source contracts the Ministry of Education entered into in Edmonton during the past three fiscal years?

Postsecondary Institution Student Loans

- Q30. Mr. Chase:
For the academic years 2007-2009 what was the total dollar value of Alberta student loans received by students while attending a postsecondary institution or private vocational school in Alberta, broken down by the last postsecondary institution attended by the student?

Assistance for Pork Producers

- Q31. Ms Pastoor:
What specific programs have been developed to aid Alberta pork producers who suffered economic losses due to the recent H1N1 outbreak?

Mental Illness in Inmate Population

- Q32. Mr. Hehr:
For the fiscal years 2007-2009 what is the total number of inmates held in Alberta correctional facilities who suffer from a diagnosed mental illness?

HIV in Inmate Population

- Q33. Mr. Hehr:
For the fiscal years 2007-2009 what was the percentage of inmates held in Alberta correctional facilities who were diagnosed as HIV positive?

Hepatitis in Inmate Population

- Q34. Mr. Hehr:
For the fiscal years 2007-2009 what was the percentage of inmates held in Alberta correctional facilities who were diagnosed with hepatitis A, B, or C?

Physical Disabilities in Inmate Population

- Q35. Mr. Hehr:
For the fiscal years 2007-2009 what was the percentage of inmates held in Alberta correctional facilities who had a physical disability?

Restaurant Inspections

- Q38. Dr. Taft:
What is the total number, from January 1, 2008, to February 4, 2010, of restaurant inspections performed by public health inspectors throughout Alberta, broken down by month?

PDD Community Board Budgets

- Q39. Ms Pastoor:
Of the six persons with developmental disabilities community boards' budgets what percentage of each of these goes directly toward supporting individuals in need, and what percentage is directed to administration?

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

Long-term Care Wait-lists

- Q10. Mr. MacDonald asked on behalf of Dr. Taft that the following question be accepted.
On February 4, 2010, how many Albertans were on wait-lists for long-term care placement both in hospital facilities and in the community, and what is the age range for these individuals?

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think this is a reasonable request, and it is information that certainly would be needed to come up with a good policy or a good plan to deal with the whole issue of individuals in this province who really need long-term care but who are occupying acute-care beds in the hospital.

3:00

Now, whether we look at the annual report of the Department of Health and Wellness, the first volume, with the performance measures in it, or we look at Alberta Health Services' own annual report for 2008-2009, we'll see where this is quite an issue. The government has had a very, very difficult time dealing with it. I believe it came up in question period last week as well. The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo asked some questions around it.

Specifically, Mr. Speaker, at the end of March 2009 there were 550 people assessed as ALC and awaiting placement for long-term care facilities in acute-care beds and 675 waiting urgently in the community. There were 150 ALC clients waiting for supportive living in acute beds and 400 waiting in the community. All clients

waiting for acute and urgently in the community will be reassessed, according to Alberta Health Services, in two to three months using the new admission guidelines that they have, and it is expected that the numbers will reverse, with the majority waiting for supportive living.

That's information that's provided in Alberta Health Services' annual report, and it's sort of a reminder to us all just what kind of a problem we've had with the lack of long-term care beds. We know it's been an ongoing issue which the government has had a great deal of difficulty in trying to resolve. To find out how many Albertans are on the wait-list for long-term care placement after what is described here, that is not an unusual or unreasonable request. Which hospital facilities in which communities these individuals are also waiting for: that is not unreasonable or unusual information to request. It would be interesting: what is the age range for these individuals?

I know we have a lot of reading material with the other written questions, but certainly Written Question 10 is appropriate, it's in order, and I would respectfully request that the hon. minister of health provide that information to us without any ifs, ands, or buts or any amendments to the written question as we had requested. I think it can be provided. I don't think the February 4, 2010, deadline is burdensome. I do not think that at all.

In conclusion, I would urge the Minister of Health and Wellness on many issues to please provide the information as requested by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising today on behalf of the Minister of Health and Wellness to move that Written Question 10 be amended as follows: by striking out "on February 4, 2010" and substituting "as of December 31, 2009" and also by striking out ", and what is the age range for these individuals?" The new question then would read as follows: "As of December 31, 2009, how many Albertans were on wait-lists for long-term care placement both in hospital facilities and in the community?"

Mr. Speaker, the rationale for this is that the specific information requested with respect to the age range of individuals waiting for long-term care placement is not available from Alberta Health Services. Further, the latest wait-list figures released by Alberta Health Services are from the third quarter of the 2009-2010 fiscal year, and as at December 31, 2009, there were 742 individuals waiting in acute care and 999 individuals waiting in the community for long-term care placement.

I would urge that the House support this amendment as I have tabled it. Thank you.

The Speaker: On the amendment, the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. With regard to the amendment our concern is that the government has substituted a date as well as not providing us with information requested. Between December 31 and February 4 a ministerial change took place. The Premier seemed to be indicating a different shift with a new minister, a new direction, the possibility of improving our so-called superboard organization. That's why we wanted to see as of February 4, 2010, whether these shifts in ministers and, potentially, shifts in attitude or in ideology were going to equate with a shift in system results. That's the reasoning behind the February 4, 2010.

Now, I appreciate that the hon. minister speaking for the minister of health indicated that, apparently, the system doesn't track age. I

would suggest that given the fact that seniors are considered bed blockers, a very derogatory term, and there are over 600 of these individuals waiting for placement, we should be able to know their ages.

Another concern about not knowing age is the fact that there are a number of individuals with disabilities, young people who, unfortunately, because we don't have the appropriate accommodations for them, find themselves shoulder to shoulder with in some cases individuals old enough to be their grandparents or great-grandparents. The age of the individuals who are caught in so-called transit is extremely important, and that's why we requested those specifics, the February 4, recognizing the ministerial changes, and the ages.

I would suggest to the hon. member that if he could pass on to the minister of health the importance of tracking ages in the future so that that information could be supplied, that would be much appreciated.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona on the amendment.

Ms Notley: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to rise just briefly, of course, to suggest why it is that we think this information is very important and to express my concern about the second amendment that's being put forward by the government.

For obvious reasons there has been a tremendous amount of discussion in the public about the provision of current and future long-term care placements throughout our province. It is an issue that has reached crisis proportions, so we need enhanced transparency on this issue. It shouldn't simply be a function of written questions in this Legislature. Rather, we should be getting this information updated on a monthly basis on a website. We should be able to track this information as quickly as the ministry gets it because this is how you ensure public accountability, the accountability of the government to the public, whom they serve.

I am quite concerned about the fact that the ministry suggests that they don't know the ages of the folks that are on the waiting lists for long-term care. Our caucus went across the province last fall having public hearings on the issues of health care, and we heard from people in every community about their concerns with respect to long-term care. One of the things that we heard about consistently in community after community after community was that the acuity of the people in long-term care is growing increasingly more onerous in terms of the services that those people require in long-term care.

Now, obviously, age is not a clear indication of the acuity of the long-term care client. However, it is one indicator. I find it really difficult to believe that the ministry is not tracking the characteristics of the people who are waiting for long-term care, whether it be a question of weight – quite honestly, we've heard that the size of patients is actually going up quite dramatically and that that's creating a huge stress on the people who work in these facilities – also the issue of mental health and also the issue of their physical state.

I'm quite shocked at the notion that this information is not something that the ministry has at its disposal, and I think it's very deeply concerning that they don't have that information. I think we should all be worried that the ministry does not have this information because it strikes me as being very unlikely that they're going to be remotely successful at addressing this crisis without some basic information like this at their disposal.

3:10

As we already heard about last week, we had an unfortunate incident north of the city in one particular long-term care facility. We know there are problems in long-term care. Last year our caucus on a daily basis in this Legislature tabled reports from people who worked in the long-term care settings outlining infractions, violations, safety concerns, and patient care concerns in a number of long-term care facilities across the province. Several months later, after we started tabling those concerns, the minister in charge of seniors had still not had any of her staff go out to any of these places to check on these concerns that were being raised.

These are really, really important issues that are facing Albertans every day, not just the number of long-term care placements available but the quality of long-term care that's being provided in the places that are there. How this issue can possibly be managed without this government having access to the information on something as simple as what the age range is for the typical long-term care patient waiting to get into long-term care is very, very concerning for me, and it should be of great concern to all Albertans. I would certainly urge this government to move forward very quickly in enhancing the information that they provide on a regular and updated basis in terms of the demographic characteristics of patients who are currently not receiving the care that they need in the setting that they need in this province.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, shall I call the question?

[Motion on amendment carried]

[Written Question 10 as amended carried]

Speaker's Ruling Consuming Food in the Chamber

The Speaker: Hon. members, before we go on to the next one, I recognize that a number of hon. members are at a disadvantage today in understanding the pie police problem. Normally the rule is that there's no food allowed in the Assembly, but because of the endurance of the members currently in the Assembly I would invite you to bring in a piece of the pie to understand the issue and have the pie in the Assembly.

We'll continue on with our work. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar on behalf of the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Provincially Funded Affordable Housing

Q27. Mr. MacDonald asked on behalf of Mr. Taylor that the following question be accepted.

What percentage of affordable housing units that have been built with provincial government funding since January 1, 2007, is currently occupied by low-income tenants?

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This, of course, is from my colleague the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie. Certainly, we all know, unfortunately, that the list of individuals with low incomes who are interested in affordable housing units continues to grow and grow and grow. We do know that hardly a Friday goes by, constituency day, while we're in session that we don't get a phone call from one individual, sometimes two, sometimes three, requesting information regarding the list: who is on it and why and how come their names cannot be added to the list of individuals who are looking for affordable housing at a very, very modest price.

Now, we do know that this government has made some strides, to their credit, to make more affordable housing units available not only in Edmonton and Calgary but throughout the province.

Now, when you compare budgets of the last, say, five years with what was occurring 25 years ago by the same party, while they've been in power for close to 40 years, one would see, if my examination of public accounts is correct, that we're actually spending less now than we did 25 years ago on affordable housing initiatives. Certainly, not only is there a need for affordable housing units, but there's also a need for housing that's dedicated specifically for individuals with very low or very modest incomes.

That's why the hon. member who is our Housing critic is requesting this information. Simply put, of all of the housing units that have been constructed, what percentage, if any, has been set aside to be occupied by individuals who are looking at a very long waiting list? Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, it's a lot longer than 18 months, and in some cases it's a lot longer than even two years, depending on some of the individual circumstances. Some individuals I have talked to – I've been astonished – have told me that it's over three years for some of them.

So this is an important question. Hopefully, we can get an answer straightaway from the government, and I look forward to reading it. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise just to respond to this question, but before I go ahead, I do want to thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar for his comments. While we have some policy differences from time to time, we do have the same goal of combating homelessness and also providing people with low-income housing, and I want to thank him for that as well. I won't speak long, as I do want to get a piece of pie.

This question should be rejected on the grounds that the data, in fact, is not presently available due to the timing in the question. Now, over the past two years, Mr. Speaker, Alberta has funded the development of an additional 6,000 units of affordable housing. Given that the initial allocations to affordable housing projects were approved by my ministry late in 2007 and 2008, it's premature to provide these occupancy statistics.

I further submit, Mr. Speaker, that from beginning to completion affordable housing projects take an average of 2.5 to three years to complete. There is, in fact, that type of lag time there. The majority of funded projects are just nearing the completion stage now, and reporting is required within six months to one year of the said completion date. About 1,250 units have been completed to date, and I can further advise this House that we expect to have meaningful occupancy statistics in time for the Housing and Urban Affairs ministry's 2010-2011 annual report. Data about the occupancy rates will be updated annually thereafter.

I further submit, Mr. Speaker, that Budget 2010 will make a total of \$88 million available through RFP, which is the request for proposals process, to support the development of affordable units for low to moderate income Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, the capital grant program is based on a partnership model which leverages private-sector dollars with taxpayers' money. I've always submitted that this is more efficient. Community partnerships allow us to build more units with less money and tailor projects to meet the unique needs of the community. We're on track to add a total of 11,000 units by 2012, something I'm very proud of as the responsible minister.

Having made my submissions, I would recommend that this House reject this motion. Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. While I appreciate what the hon. minister has provided in the way of information, I would have appreciated even more an amendment rather than an outright rejection. If there are limitations, as the minister partially spelled out, on the information that's available, it would be nice to have a report on the information that is currently available. As I said, this could have been amended rather than outwardly rejected.

The other concern in rejecting the number of affordable housing being built is the comment about the proof being in the pudding. It should be in the pie, I guess, today, Mr. Speaker. Without having the details – it's wonderful to hear about projections, and we thoroughly hope that the 17,000 or the 20,000 affordable units will be up and running and that Habitat for Humanity, for example, and the Calgary land trust will be part of the solution. I would also add that it's important that a percentage of these units be not only affordable but accessible. I hope the minister will take these concerns into account.

3:20

Also, the minister mentioned that there are annual updates. If that is the case, I'm not sure, then, why we couldn't at least have had the annual updates for 2007, for 2008, and for 2009. Obviously, we're just into the year 2010, so that would provide some difficulties with completely built structures at this point.

As I say, to outwardly reject the question that was asked instead of amending it provides us with little to no information. So back up the projection with the pie proof, please.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, do you want to close the debate? Call the question?

Mr. MacDonald: Call the question, please, Mr. Speaker.

[Written Question 27 lost]

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

Employment of Registered Nurses

Q36. Mr. Chase asked on behalf of Dr. Taft that the following question be accepted.

What was the percentage of registered nurses that worked part-time, full-time, and casual in Alberta from April 1, 2008, to February 4, 2010?

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The amendment suggests that it would strike out "April 1, 2008, to February 4, 2010," which is very specific, and substitute the generic "in 2008 and 2009." Now, the reason for this specificity of the dates is that an awful lot has happened in Alberta in terms of the health direction that we've taken. We've gone from 17 boards to nine boards down to one superboard, and with each of those moves there has been a significant attrition rate in nurses. Therefore, getting the specifics is extremely important.

Now, Stephen Duckett has caused a lot of consternation for not only nurses but recipients of health care in this province. He suggested, for example, that nurses were taking too many coffee breaks, and then he turned around and said: well, they had to take those coffee breaks; they were mandated. He suggested that some of the jobs that nurses were doing were below their job description, that they could be fulfilled by LPNs, for example. So Dr. Duckett seems to have gotten very involved in the micromanaging of the nursing profession. You would think, given that degree of oversight

and micromanagement, that the specific request, “from April 1, 2008, to February 4, 2010,” could be taken into account.

Also, almost a year ago we were looking internationally to fill 1,700 nursing positions. Then, come the completion of our session in June of 2009, all of a sudden we had a surplus. So the mathematics behind how many nurses we have, how many are doing the various positions – part-time, full-time, and casual – in Alberta, given the specified times, are extremely important. We’re at a point now where nurses are entering into contract talks with the province, and the way the province values, accounts for, remunerates, and differentiates the different levels of nurses working part-time, full-time, and casual in Alberta is extremely important.

Recruiting nurses is, obviously, something very important to this government because the postsecondaries – Grant MacEwan here in Edmonton, Mount Royal in Calgary, of course the University of Calgary, the University of Lethbridge, and the University of Alberta – have all increased the number of positions for training nurses. You would think that if we’re going to subsidize their tuition to this degree, we would have a sense of how many we actually needed and in which particular category they fit; hence the time frame of April 1, 2008, to February 4, 2010.

Again, this has been a tumultuous time in Alberta’s health care delivery system, and as such those specific details on nurses are extremely important. After the last nursing purge in the 1990s the number of nurses that were working full-time and part-time was drastically reduced, and we’ve been trying to catch up ever since. Young nursing graduates are in a lot of cases favouring part-time work because they are seeing their older counterparts wearing out on the front lines doing double shifts. They want to have a quality of personal life as well as the accredited public service life, so they are looking for that balance.

Things have changed from April 1, 2008, to February 4, 2010. The dynamics are changing, Mr. Speaker. That’s why my colleague from Edmonton-Riverview was so specific in his request.

Thank you for allowing me to point out why that request is important to us as a caucus.

The Speaker: Deputy Government House Leader, you’ve already participated.

Mr. Denis: This is Written Question 36.

The Speaker: Oh, sorry. No, you haven’t yet. Go ahead, please.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We’ve had some good pie this afternoon.

I’m rising on behalf of the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness to move an amendment to Written Question 36 striking out “from April 1, 2008, to February 4, 2010,” and substituting “in 2008 and 2009.” This would make the amended written question to read as follows: “What was the percentage of registered nurses that worked part-time, full-time, and casual in Alberta in 2008 and 2009?”

The rationale for that is that the only database that contains employment status of all registered nurses, referred to as RNs, is the College and Association of Registered Nurses of Alberta, otherwise known as CARNA. CARNA requests employment status from its members annually each September as part of their licence renewal process.

Mr. Speaker, CARNA published the following information for 2008 and 2009: RNs working full-time as of September 30, 2008, 38.1 per cent; as of September 30, 2009, 42 per cent. RNs working part-time as of September 30, 2008, 42.5 per cent; as of September 30, 2009, 37 per cent. RNs working casual as of September 30,

2008, 13.2 per cent; as of September 30, 2009, 11 per cent. RNs classified as “other” as of September 30, 2008, 6.2 per cent; as of September 30, 2009, 10 per cent. For the purpose of my comments, “other” is defined as employed in another industry, looking for employment in nursing, not employed and not looking for employment, on leave, or no response.

I would recommend that all members support this amendment to Written Question 36. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar on the amendment.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Certainly, I would have questions. I can appreciate where the hon. member from the government caucus is coming from. Specific to February 4, 2010, again, that doesn’t seem reasonable. The amendment, I think, I would be quite agreeable to if it stated the fiscal year 2007-08 and then again 2008 through 2009, just like the annual reports that are presented.

3:30

Now, I’m a little bit confused here. Is this the calendar year, or is it the year of the annual reports? If we look at the latest information presented to this House by Alberta Health Services, we can clearly see – and I’m looking at the Calgary health region, because they break it down by region. Next year whenever we get this report, I don’t know how they will do it, but I, for one, have an opinion that it will be certainly not as detailed as this, and it should be. RNs, RPNs, grad nurses: in the Calgary health region there were full-time equivalents of 6,329. We know what the base salary was, other cash benefits. We can see also what it was the previous year, in 2008, which would be the fiscal year 2007-08, March 31 year-end, as this year it would be March 31, 2009. So that’s in the Calgary region.

But there’s no breakdown on whether any of these registered nurses worked part-time, full-time, or in casual positions. There seems to be some confusion in the public because certain members of the government maintain that many of the nurses are working on a part-time basis. So the actual number would be very important for the public debate. When you look at what’s provided in the annual reports, it wouldn’t be unreasonable to suggest that this information is somewhere at the click of a mouse because you can get a lot of things in an annual report if you look.

I’ll just have a quick check of Capital health. We can see the number of full-time equivalents or employees for RNs, registered psych nurses, and grad nurses. That’s broken down as 5,813. There is a separate item for licensed practical nurses. It goes on, and they give you the total compensation package, whatever, but again no number on how many worked full-time, part-time, and casual. Certainly, that information, as I said earlier, is very important in the public health care debate in this province.

I think I could possibly be persuaded to support the amendment if I was sure it was fiscal year 2007-08 and, again, 2008-09, year-end March 31, not the calendar year as suggested in this amendment. Thank you.

The Speaker: Additional speakers on the amendment?
Should I call the question?

[Motion on amendment carried]

[Written Question 36 as amended carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Overtime Hours of Registered Nurses

Q37. Mr. Chase asked on behalf of Dr. Taft that the following question be accepted.

What was the total number of overtime hours worked by registered nurses from April 1, 2008, to February 4, 2010?

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, the backdrop for this question is a very tumultuous time back in 2009. There was considerable discussion and worry over the closure of the Alberta Hospital. There was similar concern over the closure of a total of approximately 300 beds in the Calgary and Edmonton areas. Again going back to Dr. Duckett, Dr. Duckett was suggesting that nurses by working so many overtime shifts were costing the system a tremendous amount of extra compensation.

Now, Mr. Speaker, when I was doing outreach along with my colleagues in Calgary and Edmonton, in Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, when we door-knocked, we ran into a number of nurses, and it seemed that the majority of those registered nurses were regularly performing double shifts, which of course would mean that the second of their two shifts was at an overtime rate. It wasn't something that they were doing out of a desire to increase their bank accounts. They were doing it out of necessity and to avoid burnout on the parts of their fellow colleagues.

We haven't asked for the age of the nurses serving, but we are finding that we are retaining a significant number of our nursing population, and there is a fear amongst those senior nurses that the young nurses are not coming on and of the speed to replace them. Out of a sense of lifelong and professional duty of service to their patients and their concern for their well-being the nurses are staying on longer, and because of a nursing shortage in this province they're forced into overtime circumstances.

Now, again, the timing is extremely important because things changed dramatically between April 1, 2008, and February 4, 2010. As I mentioned earlier in the discussion of Written Question 36, a number of nurses entered into the postsecondary system and began their training. A number of nurses, for example, this spring will be graduating but not finding even part-time employment in this province. Therefore, the money we'll have spent to train them, while it will have benefited the nurses to a degree as they head for employment in B.C., Saskatchewan, or, as was the case with the last tremendous exodus, down to the States – we will have lost not only our investment in their training, but we'll have lost their human resource, and we will continue to be in the position of nurses having to do double shifts, which is hardly advantageous to themselves or to their patients.

This time period is key to our request: April 1, 2008, to February 4, 2010. So when the amendment is suggested – what was the ratio of overtime hours worked to straight-time hours worked for registered nurses employed by Alberta Health Services in the former Capital, Calgary, and David Thompson health regions for the fiscal year 2008-2009? – while a correction was made noting the fiscal year, because that was one of the problems that we had with the amendment for 36, that does not take us to our current situation, where . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, the difficulty the chair has is that you're talking about an amendment that has not been introduced yet. The chair has no idea whether or not the amendment will be introduced. It may very well be that the arguments put forward by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity will be so swaying that the hon. Deputy Government House Leader will not bring forward an amendment. We can't really debate something that hasn't been introduced.

Mr. Chase: I very much appreciate that, Mr. Speaker. I was trying to actually expedite the discussion by referencing an amendment which everyone in this House has a copy of. I would not want to prolong the process, but I do appreciate your clarification and thank you very much for the opportunity.

3:40

Mr. Denis: Without further ado, Mr. Speaker, I'm rising on behalf of the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness to move an amendment to Written Question 37. The amendment is striking out "total number of overtime hours worked by registered nurses from April 1, 2008, to February 4, 2010," and substituting "ratio of overtime hours worked to straight-time hours worked for registered nurses employed by Alberta Health Services in the former Capital, Calgary, and David Thompson health regions for the fiscal year 2008-2009." Thank you.

The rationale for that is that the total amount of RN overtime hours must be viewed in context. Alberta Health Services employs approximately 75 per cent of RNs, and the remaining RNs work for a multitude of employers who may not report to government. Alberta Health Services is not able to easily pull data for the requested time frame for the entire province, Mr. Speaker, and the RNs that are in fact working in the former Capital, Calgary, and David Thompson regions represent approximately 80 per cent of RNs working directly for Alberta Health Services. RN overtime is 4.1 per cent of the total RN hours worked. RN hours worked: 17,701,730; and RN overtime hours worked: 724,529.

I would urge all members to support this amendment. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: On the amendment, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. I find this a very interesting amendment. I believe the hon. member indicated that 80 per cent of the RNs employed are in Calgary, Capital, and David Thompson, which is sort of the Edmonton-Calgary corridor, essentially. This information is all we need; however, when one looks, again, at last year's Alberta Health Services annual report, you can see where there are significant amounts being spent in some of the other former RHAs on wages, whether it be overtime or straight time, for registered nurses in the Peace Country, Aspen health region, Northern Lights, certainly the Palliser region, and East Central. East Central was the one health region that was to co-ordinate all these events that led up to the formal legal creation of Alberta Health Services. So to provide only three regions I think is unsatisfactory.

Whenever one looks at the David Thompson region – and I'm surprised that the member was so able in pulling out the statistics. I could stand corrected on this, but if you look at the Public Accounts from last year – I brought this up in budget estimates recently, and I didn't get a satisfactory answer – the David Thompson health region, the total grant, Mr. Speaker, was omitted or missing from the blue book. It is there certainly in previous years. It's there, David Thompson health region, each and every year before the last issue of the blue book, but it's not there. I don't know how the amount would fit in, but the member was very quick at providing that information through Alberta Health Services. That is an alarm for this member that that information in Public Accounts is not there, but the hon. minister seems to be able to access this information quite quickly. That's one point.

When you look again at what is suggested here, the ratio of overtime hours worked to straight-time hours for registered nurses employed by Alberta Health Services in three former regions, I think

that is a significant change from what the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview was looking for. He was looking for the total number of overtime hours. That should be available as well, and it is a request that, hopefully, we will receive other than this amended version for whatever reason the government wants to provide to us. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview certainly asked a valid question, and that we're getting just a partial answer is disappointing.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Others on the amendment?

Then we'll proceed with the question.

[Motion on amendment carried]

[Written Question 37 as amended carried]

Motions for Returns

[The Clerk of *Journals*/Table Research read the following motions for returns, which had been accepted]

Edmonton Security Operations Branch

M10. Mr. Hehr:

A return showing a copy of any reports, travel manifests, correspondence, expense claims, job listings, or operational guidelines that outline the day-to-day duties for officers of court and prisoner services, or the security operations branch as it is now called, who provide dedicated judicial security services to the judiciary in the Edmonton Law Courts.

Calgary Security Operations Branch

M11. Mr. Hehr:

A return showing a copy of any reports, travel manifests, correspondence, expense claims, job listings, or operational guidelines that outline the day-to-day duties for officers of court and prisoner services, or the security operations branch as it is now called, who provide dedicated judicial security services to the judiciary in the Calgary Courts Centre.

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

Mountain Pine Beetles

M1. Mr. Chase moved on behalf of Mr. Hehr that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of all documents, including studies, reports, and environmental or economic impact assessments, relating to the effects of the presence of mountain pine beetles in Alberta forests from fiscal years 2006-2007 through 2008-2009.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. Just for the benefit of people tuning in and wondering about the definition of motions for returns and written questions, I would just suggest that these are pieces of information that are requested because no minister could potentially be expected to have this information, sort of thumb sketches, while standing, and therefore this information is requested.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I hope I'm not going to be causing further confusion by talking about what was asked for versus what was given. But let me read into the record what was asked for. My hon. colleague from Calgary-Buffalo requested the following as Motion for a Return 1:

that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of . . .

This is very important.

. . . all documents, including studies, reports, and environmental or economic impact assessments, relating to the effects of the presence of mountain pine beetles in Alberta forests from fiscal years 2006-2007 through 2008-2009.

Now, in making that request, the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo was not seeking out the proprietary ministerial notes that belong, as I say, completely to the minister. But what the government has offered is that instead of providing all the information . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, please. Once again, nothing has been offered. You are being offered an opportunity to move a motion. I've accepted that. That's what the Assembly is listening to. There is nothing else that has happened yet. So proceed with the offering given to you.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I'll look forward to discussing the amendment, as you suggest, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would move that Motion for a Return 1 be amended to read, "a copy of studies, reports, and environmental or economic impact assessments relating to the effects of the presence of mountain pine beetles in Alberta forests from fiscal years 2006-2007 through 2008-2009." The amendment is based on a couple of reasons. First of all, the request for all documents is too broad and consists of a large volume of records, that could be quite overwhelming. The department would like to provide the member with a reasonable amount of meaningful material respecting the intent of his request.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: On the amendment, the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

3:50

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Speaking to the amendment, the difference between all and some is very much open to interpretation. As elected members of this Assembly we need to be operating on the same basis of understanding and information as the hon. members of government. Regardless of which side of the House we are sitting, we're all expected to represent our constituents to the highest level possible, and if we don't have the information necessary to provide that advice or to form judgments, then not only are we left out of the information cycle, but also our constituents are left out of that information cycle.

The pine beetle is a menace, and I am pleased that the government, in managing the pine beetle, has seen fit to place selective logging, cutting, and burning as one of their highest forms of combatting the beetle. They've also used the pheromone way of trying to distract pine beetles and capture them and prevent further damage. I credit the government with the forms of combatting this scourge and attempting to prevent it from hitting the boreal forests to the rest of Canada, east of us.

However, the minister says: "We'll give you some of this information. We'll give you a few studies, maybe the odd report, and, you know, if it's a good day, we'll provide some environmental and economic impact assessments, and you should be happy with that information." The government could save the opposition and the general public a whole lot of requests by simply putting this information on the website. If it is so cumulatively excessive as to be denied in a request, then I would suggest that we have as Alberta taxpayers paid for this research. We've paid for these reports and

studies and the impacts, and that should be common knowledge. It shouldn't be something that has to be requested as a motion for a return. I would encourage the hon. minister, who is new to this portfolio, to follow the transparency and accountability mandate issued to him by the Premier and make as much of this information available through the web to all Albertans.

Thank you. I also, Mr. Speaker, a teacher of a teacher, appreciate the clarification on the amendment process.

[Motion on amendment carried]

The Speaker: Now, I can offer the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity an opportunity to close debate, but I suspect I should just call the question.

[Motion for a Return 1 as amended carried]

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

Sour Gas Release in Lodgepole Area

M2. Mr. Chase moved on behalf of Ms Blakeman that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of all reports and data regarding the environmental impacts of the gas release near Lodgepole on December 16, 2009.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. May I speak to that?

The Speaker: Oh, yes. Absolutely. You have the floor.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. We've had a series of gas releases throughout Alberta's history, the most serious ones having to do with the release of hydrogen sulphide. This is of considerable concern to all Albertans and, obviously, the people living in the vicinity affected by that Lodgepole blowout. Now, I don't have anything, Mr. Speaker, suggesting that this was amended, the request. All I have, I gather, is an outward rejection of the request. Therefore, I would ask: why is this information not being provided to the opposition? Why is it not, through the opposition's request, being provided to the residents of the Lodgepole area or to all Albertans?

Our economy is highly dependent on gas. I know the play has changed with the advent of shale, but the amount of gas that we have in Alberta, which is of the highly volatile sour gas nature, is a tremendous concern. Without receiving that background information, how do Albertans prepare for the advent of blowouts?

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

We've had reason to be concerned. For example, at the Shell plant around Pincher Creek instead of the gas being ignited – this was sour gas – the ignition system twice failed. We are left to wonder what happened with the Lodgepole circumstance. Unfortunately, I gather by the government's response that not only will we be left wondering, but all Albertans will be left wondering.

This is not only an economic issue. It's a safety issue. It's an environmental issue. That's why the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre requested those documents. Not only will I be interested; the hon. member will be interested and all Albertans whose livelihood depends to a large extent on the reserve of gas and who want to be able to live in a safe province where we enjoy the fruits of our labour, where we enjoy our God-given nonrenewable resources but don't fear the possibility of blowouts such as the Lodgepole that we have requested information about dating back to 2009.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can't say I'm looking forward to the reason for rejection, but at least it'll be on the record.

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

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First, I wanted to thank the Member for Calgary-Varsity for his comments about this gas release. The gas release obviously is a concern to the government itself, specifically the gas release that occurred at a sour crude well site operated by Daylight Energy Ltd.

A bit of background, Mr. Speaker. The release of gas happened about four kilometres west of Lodgepole, and I'm happy to say that no injuries occurred and no evacuations were in fact required. Of course, the Energy Resources Conservation Board was notified promptly of this incident, and they responded immediately and, in fact, worked diligently with the company and emergency response teams to successfully contain the gas release.

Following this, as is normal practice, Mr. Speaker, the ERCB launched an investigation into this matter. In the course of reviewing this motion, I have consulted with the hon. Minister of Energy, and I have been told that the ERCB is in the process of, in fact, preparing a report about the Lodgepole incident. This is expected to be made public in the summer of this year. I would also expect that issues and information referred to in this motion would also be addressed in this report.

At this juncture, Mr. Speaker, it would be premature of me to release information on behalf of the Minister of Energy which is part of an in-progress investigation by the ERCB. I would therefore urge all members to reject this motion. I will add, however, Mr. Speaker, that the office of the hon. Minister of Energy would be happy to forward the completed report to the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity when it becomes publicly available and table it in the Assembly at the first possible opportunity.

In conclusion, I would urge all members to reject this motion with respect to the gas release. Thank you.

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

[Motion for a Return 2 lost]

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

4:00

Natural Gas Valuations

M3. Mr. MacDonald moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of all financial forecasts, economic trend reporting, and any recommendations that were prepared by Alberta finance regarding natural gas valuation for the fiscal periods 2010-2020.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We can look at the fiscal plan with the budget, and we can see where there is a natural gas price or a benchmark through to 2013. It certainly indicates that natural gas prices would or should increase to around \$6.59 or \$6.60. That would be a considerable increase from last year at \$3.99 for the Alberta reference price.

We're in a fiscal year where for the first time that I can recall – and it may be the first time ever – royalties from bitumen or upgraded bitumen, synthetic crude oil, will be larger or greater than royalties that are collected on natural gas. We do know that the amount collected in royalties from natural gas over the last number of years has been significant, and this motion would provide information that is necessary, the information that Alberta finance is using not only for its price benchmark through to 2013 but on what exactly is going to happen for the next decade.

We realize that there is a \$4.3 billion deficit. We heard in question period, of course, earlier that it's much higher than that,

over \$7 billion. Time will tell who was right on that, but I do know that the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development worries day and night about the deficit and the consequences of the deficit. A lot of this, of course, is not only caused by a lot of wasteful spending by this government but also by the price of natural gas or the lack of a price.

The Americans, what they're going to do. Now, the Premier today talked about shale gas and the implications of that to our province, and the Premier is absolutely right to be concerned about this. There have been significant discoveries of shale gas in various places in the lower 48 states. This motion, Motion for a Return 3, certainly would reveal exactly what Alberta finance has done in regard to the significant discoveries of shale gas in the lower 48 states.

Now, U.S. domestic natural gas production, Mr. Speaker, has increased 6.8 per cent since 2005 despite significant decreases in offshore production. Offshore production is in the U.S. Gulf of Mexico. We also know that the share of U.S. gas production from unconventional sources has increased steadily since 1990, and gas shales have been a major contributor to this growth. The Barnett shale production in Texas was 94 million cubic feet per day in 1998, and it has increased by more than 3,000 per cent to over 3 billion cubic feet per day in 2007. There also have been other discoveries: the Haynesville, Fayetteville, Woodford shales, and of course the largest one that I'm aware of is the Marcellus basin, which incorporates much of West Virginia, Pennsylvania, New York state. It even goes up under Lake Erie through Ohio. I think it catches a part of southwestern Ontario.

But there are reports by Navigant that the total production for these shale plays, these big seven shale plays, in the next decade, the next 10 to 15 years – and that's why it's important that we get this information we're requesting in Motion for a Return 3 – could be between 27 billion and 39 billion cubic feet a day. If that happens, that's going to have a major implication on the price we get here in Alberta when we export natural gas. It's also going to have an effect on natural gas as a feedstock for the oil sands development and also for electricity generation and also for the petrochemical industry. I think they will be positive developments, but whenever you consider how much money has been raised in the past through natural gas royalties, this production valuation, if it does come true in the lower 48 states, is going to have a significant influence on us. Now, certainly, the same corporations that are active in the lower 48 states are busy here as well.

Before I conclude, Mr. Speaker, I would like to note that in many of these states, particularly in New York and Pennsylvania, we're looking at a 12 and a half per cent royalty rate for this kind of gas. Motion for a Return 3 could certainly give us an indication, if we were to receive the information, just exactly what the province expects to collect in royalties as a percentage of production or the value of production. I would calculate that on my own if I had to, but those states are looking at a royalty rate of that nature.

Now, things are always bigger in Texas, and whenever you look at royalties, it certainly is true. The royalty rate in Texas on shale gas as a rate and a per cent is 25 per cent. Royalty rates were more common at 20 to 25 per cent about five years ago, but most state-owned lands are not considered to be among the best sites for shale gas development. That's one of the comments that's made in this document I had from America.

Now, the royalty rates on private lands in Texas: again, they're big. Things are bigger in Texas. It's 25 to 28 per cent, and the bonus bid per acre – and this is going back to 2008, at the height of the boom – was between \$10,000 and \$20,000 per acre. In New York state it was \$2,000 to \$3,000, as was it in Pennsylvania. The

royalty rates on private lands there were 17 to 18 per cent for Pennsylvania and 15 to 20 per cent for New York. But that's on private lands; that's not on Crown land.

Just as a comparison, Mr. Speaker, in 2008 if the bonus bid on private land in Texas ranged between \$10,000 and \$20,000 per acre, in the same time period in this province the average price per hectare for 2008-09 was \$420. It would be roughly half, slightly less than half of that for an acre, so we could say \$200. That's a very interesting comparison at this time.

Now, with Motion for a Return 3, if it was to come as we had requested, there is a lot of information that landowners in this province who have mineral rights would be very keen to read and determine for themselves whether they're getting the best deal possible or not. Certainly, whenever you look at the financial forecasts, economic trend reporting, and any recommendations that are or were prepared by Alberta finance regarding natural gas valuation, I would really welcome that information, and I expect to get it.

Thank you.

4:10

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

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the comments from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. Many of these topics were discussed at some conferences that I attended last year, when I was parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Energy. I have spoken with the Minister of Energy, and this broad-ranging motion is requesting all financial forecasts, economic trend data, and recommendations that are involved with natural gas valuation for a specific period in time.

Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to say a few words about forecasting the price of commodities such as natural gas. I wish I could say that this is, in fact, an exact science. We all know that it is not. It is a process that involves large sets of market data well beyond estimation and approximation, but that does play a major factor in that as well.

Mr. Speaker, part of the issue is that much of the information received by Alberta Energy to produce these estimates is provided by parties such as banks, finance-orientated businesses, market research corporations, consultant agencies, and world financial centres. This information is proprietary. It's disclosed to the government under conditions of legal confidentiality, which I can appreciate needs to be respected. One of my concerns would be that this motion as it stands may be easily interpreted so that the door is opened to this data.

As I've spoken to the Minister of Energy, he's indicated to me that he provides information to the President of the Treasury Board and the Minister of Finance and Enterprise which is in fact utilized in the preparation of the provincial budget and a three-year fiscal plan. Essentially, this would be an analysis of the aggregate proprietary information that I referenced earlier in this address. This information becomes summarized in such a way that it does not refer to an individual or to a company. Rather, it becomes publicly available in the provincial budget and the Ministry of Energy's business plan. I would suggest, with respect, Mr. Speaker, that if this hon. member is interested in the government's forecasting and trending for natural gas, he should review these documents because that's where the information is.

I would advise all hon. members, accordingly, to reject this motion. Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. While I understand that the nature of sort of the in-house discussions between various companies in the field and the government is of a proprietary nature, unless we understand the premise under which the government is going forward and making its financial decisions on royalties, then how can we possibly move forward? What's the premise upon which we're making our forecasts?

Gas has played such a significant part in terms of billions and billions of royalty dollars that we've received up to this point, and our dependency on our primary source of royalty revenue, being gas, has changed dramatically. Not so long ago we thought that the last easy gas was gone and that we would be encroaching into the foothills, that we would potentially be interrupting our underground aquifers, our basins, and we had to balance how valuable this gas was in comparison to the risks that would be taken to extract it.

Now, we've seen terrible examples in the States – in Wyoming, in New Mexico – where in going after coal-bed methane, which is a type of gas that belongs in the shale group, disastrous circumstances occurred in terms of underground aquifers. No amount of gas revenue will make up for the loss or the poisoning of wells and the loss of those aquifers, so the importance of coming up with a premise, a go-forward, is extremely important.

We are fortunate to have in this province our backup of the Alberta oil sands, and fortunately through scientific technology, innovation, research we are moving away from the traditional shovel method, with its accompanying tailings ponds, to the less environmentally destructive in situ. But we're still involving water, and the balance between the reward and the price of the commodity, which now seems to be in abundant supply, and the risk to our future development and economy in terms of the water risk has to be taken into account.

I think Albertans need assurances given the fact that the government has redone its royalty review six times and seems to have gone right back to the last days of the Klein empire with this most recent result. Yet what are we basing our decisions on in terms of the quantity of available gas and where it will be processed? We've had several members ask questions about, for example, the upgrading of bitumen or the upgrading of gas.

Previously a lot of our gas has been upgraded in Texas and in Illinois. That should be part of the premise, the projection as to what will be our capacity to not only acquire this gas but also to refine it. Instead of Chicago, Illinois, taking out the butane, taking out the propane, taking out the methane, and getting a much higher price for these parts of the natural gas refinement process, we need to know: where is the government going ahead? We basically need to know: does the government have a plan to go ahead, and if so, on what basis are we moving forward?

Gas no longer plays the role it once did. But as we move on, as the request says, towards 2020, it is possible that given our extraction methods and the speed at which governments need to make up for their recessionary blunders, which are particularly obvious south of the 49th, they're going to go after that gas with the greatest of speed possible to pay down their budget deficits in the trillions of dollars.

We have an opportunity to potentially learn from their mistakes, as I mentioned, in Wyoming and New Mexico. But if we don't know what the formula is and what the projections are, then how can the minister of finance or the hon. President of the Treasury Board account for the importance of gas in future budgets. It's impossible, we know, to crystal ball exactly what percentage we're going to get in the future. But it seems that the process has been delayed until 2011 and we can't even get a forecast into what we're expecting to receive in terms of projected gas revenue for the next year, never

mind where we're going in the next 19. If we don't start thinking beyond our recession and our bust-boom scenario, and don't have, "If this happens, we'll do this; if that happens, we'll take these methods" – if we don't have these premises, then how can we possibly make budgetary projections?

I thank the hon. Speaker for allowing me to participate in this debate. I know that with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar's extensive experience in industry, he has a much better understanding, but even he with his wide knowledge is looking for clarification from his government colleagues.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar to close the debate.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Hon. member, being a boilermaker doesn't make me an expert, but as a taxpayer in this province and as a citizen of this province it makes me very interested in this.

Now, the Deputy Government House Leader in rejecting this motion indicated that there were many proprietary and confidential estimates made, but I would ask him to respectfully look at page 140, the economic outlook, in the government's fiscal plan for the current budget cycle that we are debating. You can see where there's a natural gas price benchmark in Henry Hub numbers, not Alberta reference price numbers, and it comes from a wide range of national forecasting agencies for a period of four years. They are not concerned about hiding. Their projections are here for everyone to read. It's not a confidential deal between themselves and Alberta Finance or the Treasury Board or the Department of Energy.

4:20

The national forecasting agencies include the Conference Board of Canada, Global Insight, the centre for economics. Again, they go almost halfway through the period which I'm requesting in Motion for a Return 3.

Banks and investment dealers. For instance, we've got BMO Capital Markets, Credit Suisse, CIBC World Markets, J.P. Morgan, National Bank Financial equity research, Peters & Co. Limited from Calgary, RBC Capital Markets, Scotiabank, Toronto-Dominion Bank. These are the banks and investment dealers. The idea that this is confidential and private information is totally wrong, Mr. Speaker.

Industry analysts – U.S. Energy Information Administration, GLJ Petroleum Consultants, Sproule Associates – they're all willing to put their estimates in the public domain. So for them to do that and for the hon. minister across the way to suggest that somehow the information that I'm requesting is proprietary or confidential is flat out wrong, Mr. Speaker. That's no reason in the world to reject this very good motion, and I hope the government changes its mind and presents that information. They're the ones that are running the \$4.3 billion deficit, not anyone else.

Thank you.

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

[Motion for a Return 3 lost]

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

Alberta Hospital Edmonton Implementation Team

M4. Mr. Chase moved on behalf of Dr. Taft that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of all reports and recommendations prepared by the Alberta Hospital

Edmonton implementation team between October 6, 2009, and January 18, 2010.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I don't believe that there was a more emotional circumstance that rallied people to this cause since, basically, Bill 11, which set to undermine universal health care, that got people so concerned. It wasn't just Edmonton residents that were concerned about the potential closure of Alberta Hospital. There were patients suffering from mental illness throughout the province that had the potential of ending up at Alberta Hospital, which, due to its rural setting, offered healing in just its location, never mind the professional practices which were incorporated in the facility.

This is a very specific, very short timeline request: October 6, 2009, to January 18, 2010. A terrific amount of attitudinal change occurred. To the government's credit they appointed the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford to chair the committee to reconsider the wisdom of closing all the beds at Alberta Hospital. I credit the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford for doing the research that he did that obviously had an impact on his fellow and female colleagues in terms of reversing a very detrimental decision. Now, that decision hasn't been completely reversed because there is still talk about using that facility partly, I believe, in a long-term fashion and taking some of the more senior individuals suffering from mental illness and removing them from that facility to another facility that is currently being built, of a much more urban nature and closer to the Edmonton hubbub of activity.

As I recall, several thousand signatures were tabled in this House by members of the Alberta Liberal Official Opposition, by the member from the Wildrose – there was just one member at that time, initially – and also by our hon. members from Alberta's third party, the New Democratic Party. The point is that we saw on television ads, we heard on the radio, there were numerous op-ed pieces, numerous articles written about the negative impact of the closure of Alberta Hospital. It was based upon the concern for that potential closure and the relief felt when the closure was not going to be as dramatically carried out that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview requested a copy of all reports and recommendations prepared by the group that was activated under the then minister of health to review what, admittedly, was a bad decision.

Now, we're hoping that the government learned something from that bad decision that could potentially be applied to other institutions. The current minister of health has indicated that he's reconsidering the closure of 300 beds, cumulatively, in Calgary and Edmonton. I wonder: was his decision in part founded on the findings of the Edmonton implementation team for Alberta Hospital?

This government, since our Premier was appointed leader, has emphasized transparency and accountability, yet . . . [interjections] Well, selected. Yes, I should say selected. Selected by members of the Conservative Party to lead the government. He was initially rejected, but in the second round selected, and then he was elected to another term in his constituency.

Anyway, the point being: he has emphasized transparency and accountability. He is your leader. Follow-through with what he has requested. Follow-through with what we've requested. Show us that there is really a plan.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just rise to speak briefly on this motion. I'd like to thank the Member for Calgary-Varsity for his comments, specifically about teachers. You know, my mother was a teacher for 33 years, and she taught me very well.

Moving forward, Mr. Speaker, I cannot recommend acceptance of this motion, the rationale being that the team's report with recommendations to Alberta Health Services already is available publicly. It was released as a backgrounder on January 18, 2010, and the news release is available at www.albertahealthservices.ca/1324.asp.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity to conclude the debate.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the references to where this information is available. It would have been a whole lot simpler and this debate would have been considerably shorter if you'd just provided that information as requested in our motion for a return.

Thank you.

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

[Motion for a Return 4 lost]

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

4:30 Acute-care Bed Closures

M5. Mr. Chase moved on behalf of Dr. Taft that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of all stakeholder consultations, reports, research, or recommendations that resulted in the recent decision to not close 290 acute care beds throughout the province.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I'm doing so well today in terms of having motions for returns rejected.

Albertans are suffering from whiplash. They don't know what the next move is from this government. We have one minister that rides a black horse throughout the province, closing hospitals in his wake. Then we have the minister on the white horse saying: "Oh, no, that was a mistake. We are going to reopen. We're not going to close those 290 beds. We're not going to play musical beds anymore at the Rockyview. We're not going to play musical beds at the Peter Lougheed. We're not only going to not close those beds; we're going to keep them open." All hail the new minister of health for having changed the circumstance not one bit. The beds were open; they stay open. We celebrate the fact that they're open, and there you have 300 complements that are currently unstaffed.

It was based on that whiplash reaction that we requested the reasoning behind the change of attitude. So we got a new minister. What happens – heaven forbid – should the minister of health not be able to continue his duties and we get another minister? Heaven forbid that we get the old one back and have: oh, no, today we're closing the beds. We are asking on behalf of all Albertans to give us a sense and give Albertans faith that there is actually a plan, that when the government makes a decision, it's based on research, that it's based on a collaborative preface, that it isn't simply: you know, I got up on the right-hand side of the bed today, and I think I'll close 290 of these complements. What's the reasoning? Albertans want to know. We want to know as their representative.

I look forward to the hon. member enlightening me as to where this information can be found and why we're not being entitled to receive it on behalf of all Albertans looking for this information.

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

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much. I want to thank the Member for Calgary-Varsity for that rather impassioned speech. I trust that this member doesn't have an issue with new ministers per se.

My comments will be rather brief as well. Quite simply, Mr. Speaker, there are no consultation reports. On January 20, 2010, the health minister announced that plans to close acute-care hospital beds in the Edmonton and Calgary areas would be put on hold pending a review. The same minister indicated that since Alberta Health Services announced their plan in September 2009, progress has been made in identifying efficiencies to reduce costs in administration, and the minister has made a decision based on this positive development.

Mr. Speaker, a lot of the member's comments, with respect, were baseless conspiracy theories. I speak quite often with health care professionals, one in particular in this city, and I see no evidence of that at all. I would ask this House to reject this motion.

Thank you.

[Motion for a Return 5 lost]

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

Labour Protection for Paid Farm Workers

M6. Mr. Chase moved on behalf of Ms Pastoor that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of all reports, studies, and memoranda prepared by Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development since January 27, 2009, that contemplate the inclusion of paid farm workers under provincial workplace health and safety legislation.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a very good thing that I don't take these defeats personally, or I could no longer live with myself or my colleagues.

Now, I have a horrible feeling, Mr. Speaker, that I know the answer. The answer is probably: well, we haven't contemplated anything in terms of protecting farm workers. We're going to, as we heard today, put out I think it was something like \$680,000 in terms of an education program to prevent farm injuries, that are occurring on the basis of two individuals being killed per month and hundreds being injured. You know, I may have actually guessed or read the hon. member's mind as to the answer to this question, but if that's the case, that's a pretty sad answer.

Farm workers – and I'm talking about those beyond the family farm, and we lose a lot of family members on farms as well. More and more of agriculture is becoming commercialized, industrialized, and more and more workers are paying the price of that commercialization with lack of protection for the individuals involved.

We've had a judge in our latest review of the death of an individual, Kevan Chandler, look at recommendations for individuals being covered by compensation. Not only is it the compensation for the injured worker, but the compensation for the widow or the husband and the children left behind is extremely important. Without that compensation it's just absolutely cruel.

In terms of workmen's compensation or legislation, we have pages and pages of fine print of individuals and workers, not only in the agricultural sector but across this province, who are not covered by workmen's compensation. If they're injured, whether it's a repetitive stress injury or whether it's a very traumatic injury, they're not covered. So we said: well, let's start. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East said: let's start.

Given the judge's recommendations, given the number of deaths, given the number of injuries, has the government decided to take action and contemplate the inclusion of paid farm workers under

provincial workplace health and safety legislation? As I began, all I've heard is a few thousand dollars on an education program.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the member's concerns. I'm rising on behalf of the hon. Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to move an amendment to Motion for a Return 6, which reads as follows: by striking out "all reports, studies, and memoranda" and substituting therewith "the report titled Stakeholders' Consultation: Occupational Health and Safety, prepared in November 2009"; secondly, by striking out "prepared by Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development" and substituting "for Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development and Alberta Employment and Immigration"; and thirdly, by striking out "since January 27, 2009, that contemplate" and substituting "that addresses in part."

I have a hard time looking at that myself after those amendments, but this would read, Mr. Speaker:

That an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of the report titled Stakeholders' Consultation: Occupational Health and Safety, prepared in November 2009 for Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development and Alberta Employment and Immigration, that addresses in part the inclusion of paid farm workers under provincial workplace health and safety legislation.

Thank you very much.

4:40

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

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. To the hon. Deputy Government House Leader: will that amended motion be tabled here in the Assembly in the next day or perhaps Wednesday if it is to be accepted by the House?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader on the amendment.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will ensure that the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development does so.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on the amendment.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. Also, to close, Mr. Speaker, unless there are others who wish to participate in the debate.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, the amendments page has been circulated. You should have it on your desks.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Obviously, we're pleased to receive some of the information, but what the government has done in this amendment is be very selective. We have no idea through their selectivity if they are not just going to simply hand us information that supports their position, that this isn't a concern. We've asked for a variety of reports, and the government has said: well, we'll give you Stakeholders' Consultation: Occupational Health and Safety, prepared in November 2009 for Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development and Alberta Employment and Immigration, that addresses in part – so they're giving us partial information. They admit that they're giving us partial information, and we're supposed to say: well, thank you very much for giving us a small part of what we've requested.

You've changed the date. You've changed the reports that were going to be given to us, that were requested, and instead of providing all the reports and the studies and the memoranda, you're going to give Albertans one. At some point – and it's probably, Mr. Speaker, going to take a minority government to achieve it – the transparency and accountability that this current government professes will actually occur.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. member wish to speak on the amendment?

The chair shall now call the question on the amendment.

[Motion on amendment carried]

[Motion for a Return 6 as amended carried]

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

Asset-backed Commercial Paper

M7. Mr. MacDonald moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of all financial forecasts, economic trend reporting, and any other documents prepared by the Alberta Treasury Board regarding asset-backed commercial paper for the 2010 fiscal year.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, whenever we look at this whole issue of asset-backed commercial paper, we're going back a number of years. We can almost go back to 2007, when there were caution lights on this whole investment scheme. Certainly, in 2008 we look at the report of the Auditor General and some of the questions he had around asset-backed commercial paper at ATB Financial, the treasury management of that. I won't spend too long on the facts that were presented to the public through the Auditor's report, but certainly asset-backed commercial paper is a short-term investment, usually maturing in less than a year but often in as little as a month. Asset-backed commercial paper is backed by a variety of assets, such as mortgage loans, car loans, credit card balances, and other interest-bearing assets, and/or by synthetic assets such as collateralized debt obligations, or CDOs, or credit default swaps. The investor buys the paper for less than the face value and holds the paper until it matures, at which point the investor receives the face value of the paper or the instrument. The difference between the purchase price and the face value of the paper is interest income to the investor.

Now, we do know what's happened at the Treasury Branches, which I mentioned before. We also know that the University of Calgary, the University of Alberta had an exposure to this. We know the details of the Montreal accord, which, hopefully, will resolve this issue, and hopefully there will not be any more significant losses to this province. I hope there are no more significant losses throughout the investment community in North America or internationally, but I'm not so sure. However, I think it's reasonable to request a copy of all the financial forecasts, economic trend reporting, and any other documents prepared by Treasury Board regarding this issue for the fiscal year 2010.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I urge the members to reject this motion. The Ministry of the Treasury Board is responsible for meeting the legislative commitment to be accountable to

Albertans through the publishing of annual audited financial statements. Any changes that are coming to the government's investments in asset-backed commercial paper will be disclosed in the government of Alberta's 2009-10 annual report, which will be released in June 2010. However, Treasury Board is not responsible for preparing financial forecasts and economic trend reporting on government investments in asset-backed commercial paper. As such, we do not have any requested information.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you. We're fortunate in this nation, in Canada, that we did not get bitten to the extent our southern neighbour did by the subprime mortgages, which form an awful lot of the phony finances of asset-backed commercial paper. That said, we did get hit. AIMCo got hit, the independent financial arm of the Alberta government. Alberta Treasury Branches got hit by asset-backed commercial paper. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar mentioned what happened to the University of Calgary's endowment fund. In discussions with the hon. minister of advanced education, innovation, and technology he explained that one of the reasons that his colleagues weren't in favour of endowment funds was the lack of security within the investment environment, and he didn't believe that creating endowment funds was even a partial solution.

This province along with the province of Quebec is resisting very aggressively the notion of a national securities regulator, yet the protection afforded to Albertans by our own securities regulator did not prevent the millions of dollars lost in asset-backed commercial paper. The government, which is the backup for the Alberta Treasury Branch – and the government makes the investments for a series of funds, including the heritage trust fund – is reliant on making sound investments.

So when the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar asks for a copy of all financial forecasts, economic trends reporting, and any other documents prepared by the Alberta Treasury Board regarding asset-backed commercial paper for the 2010 fiscal year, you would hope to be getting something along the lines of: been there, done that. These are the wise preventative measures that we can assure Albertans that their investments, whether their own investments or those by the government, whether directly, as is the case with the heritage trust fund, or through AIMCo or their finances being looked after by the primary rural bank, the Alberta Treasury Branch, are secure. Unfortunately, the hon. member, the President of the Treasury Board, has said: we're not going to provide you with that information.

4:50

Mr. Snelgrove: Ask the right department.

Mr. Chase: Well, I would certainly ask you on behalf of all Albertans to request it from the ministry of finance if that's the right department. But, please, don't sidestep the financial responsibility by saying that you're asking the wrong ministry. If that's the sole reason we're not receiving this answer, then it's a sad circumstance.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion for a Return 7 lost]

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

Long-Term Investment Strategies

M8. Mr. MacDonald moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of all financial forecasts, economic trend reporting, and any other documents prepared

for the Alberta Treasury Board or Alberta Finance and Enterprise by the Alberta Investment Management Corporation concerning long-term investment strategies for the fiscal periods 2010-2020.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much. I might be in for more bad news from the hon. President of the Treasury Board, but I certainly would like to move Motion for a Return 8, please.

Mr. Speaker, I think this motion is certainly timely. We look at any number of investments that have been made on behalf of citizens of this province by the government. We look at what has happened with investment income in the past whenever we failed to achieve our targets, and we were basically short of cash and in deficit. We rely, whether it's right or wrong, on the investment return, for instance, from the Alberta heritage savings trust fund for a certain percentage of total government revenue.

There are other pools of investment as well. Long-term investments include: the Alberta heritage savings trust fund and the associated endowment funds, global equity markets, interest, and exchange rates. Also hopefully included in this would be the amounts that are held as cash in the general revenue fund and also amounts – and I'm sure they do – in the sustainability fund before that money goes. What exactly are the long-term goals or strategies of AIMCo?

Now, I was surprised to realize that AIMCo wasn't selected by Alberta Health Services to be their investment desk of choice, if you could use those words, Mr. Speaker, to invest any short-term cash that they may have. They are doing their investing through I believe it's a branch of RBC, the Royal Bank of Canada, and it's a decision the board has recently made. I'm quite surprised that they didn't have the confidence in Alberta Investment Management Corporation that this government does. They are looking at a significant pool of cash to manage over the next decade. It would be standing at \$69 billion right now, and I certainly hope it increases beyond that.

Certainly, that is the intent of our motion. I will await the government's response, but I don't see any reason in the world why we should not be able to get that information.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise on behalf of the Minister of Finance and Enterprise just to respond to Motion 8. AIMCo was established to be operationally independent, and in order to avoid a conflict of interest, it does not participate in government policy-making. So it would be inappropriate for them to be in fact providing policy advice of this nature to the government or another body.

In the normal course of business AIMCo frequently produces financial forecasts and reports economic trends and analysis, but these are provided to AIMCo's clients, which include without limitation the boards of public-sector pension plans, the government endowment funds, and others. With respect, Mr. Speaker, neither the Alberta Treasury Board nor Alberta Finance and Enterprise has requested any such documents to be provided exclusively to them for any special purpose such as long-term investment strategies for the fiscal periods between 2010 and 2020.

Mr. Speaker, in the normal course of their business AIMCo frequently produces financial forecasts; however, these are intended to be widely used by, again, all of their clients. Moreover, as I mentioned, AIMCo has to be independent. For these reasons neither the minister nor I believe that this motion should pass, and I would therefore ask that all members vote to reject Motion 8.

Thank you.

Mr. Chase: I'm sorry to hear of this rejection. It concerns me tremendously that the government by having AIMCo as an independent arm may simply be using AIMCo and its management and its expertise for the purposes of deniability, that says that because they're such an independent arm of the government, they don't have to report necessarily to the Auditor General. It sounds like they don't have to report, certainly, to Albertans in general, never mind members of the opposition. So it sounds like they've got *carte blanche* in terms of investment, yet the money they invest belongs to all Albertans, and our future well-being is staked upon the decisions they make.

Now, in this highly volatile time I was pleased to read recently that the approximately 2 and a half billion to 3 billion dollars that had been lost appeared to have been regained. The decisions that were made that led to this regaining would be extremely important, and the decisions going forward that AIMCo makes and how they formulate these decisions I think would not only be advantageous to this House but could serve as kind of a learning process for all Albertans in terms of proper investment.

So it's again with disappointment that this information is considered proprietary, which has been the word of the day if this were *Sesame Street*.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion for a Return 8 lost]

Motions Other than Government Motions

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

Anaphylaxis Policy for Schools

504. Mr. MacDonald moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to introduce legislation requiring all school boards to establish and maintain an anaphylactic policy that includes strategies to reduce exposure to anaphylactic causative agents, information on life-threatening allergies, annual first aid training on dealing with life-threatening allergies, and a requirement for every school principal to develop a plan for each pupil affected by an anaphylactic allergy, including the maintenance of a file for each anaphylactic pupil.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and present before the Legislative Assembly motions other than government motions, this one specifically Motion 504.

5:00

Now, Mr. Speaker, there are, unfortunately, many students throughout the province who have a condition, an allergy or a severe reaction to any number of things, including certain foods, insect stings, and products even like latex. These allergic reactions can unfortunately in some cases be life threatening. Motion 504 would require school boards to put in place a policy to protect students with these life-threatening allergies. I have talked to people from across the province – from our own constituency, from people in Spruce Grove, some people in Calgary, an individual from Red Deer – concerned about the lack of standards. All these parents, all these families are concerned about the lack of standards across our province.

Now, Manitoba and Ontario have legislation in place to ensure that there are standards across each and every school throughout their provinces. British Columbia has issued a ministerial order requiring such policies. Alberta does not have legislation, Mr.

Speaker, or regulation and leaves it up to school boards to have a policy in place. We know that a committee was struck in Alberta to create a resource kit on anaphylaxis that was mailed to schools in 2006 and 2007.

Certainly, before I go any further, Mr. Speaker, I would like to express my gratitude to the many people from across the province who have given myself and our research staff advice and direction on this matter. I just would like to say that I appreciate their time, their interest in this issue. Hopefully, this motion will eventually end up in a law or regulation that is protecting each and every student regardless of whether they have an allergy or not. I know that our School Act ensures that when students go to school, they're in a safe environment. This is one thing that, in my view, has been overlooked, and we have an opportunity today to correct it.

Anaphylaxis is a severe allergic reaction to certain agents, as I said earlier. It can be triggered by a number of agents. The most common and most widely discussed trigger, however, is food. No one is saying that we're going to ban any kind of food or food product from a school or from a cafeteria or from a field trip. No one is saying that whatsoever. A reaction can result from even trace amounts of foods such as peanuts, tree nuts, seafood, and products made with eggs and/or dairy. Anaphylaxis is usually diagnosed in childhood, but it can develop later on in life.

Now, a reaction involves multiple systems, including the skin, respiratory, cardiovascular, and gastrointestinal systems. At its most extreme a shock results from a massive overreaction of the body's immune system to a particular agent. Individuals undergoing the shock could experience symptoms such as swelling, breathing difficulties, abdominal cramps, diarrhea, nausea, and circulatory collapse. Anaphylactic shock can also induce coma and can lead to death, unfortunately. A life-threatening reaction can develop rapidly, so every moment is valuable when assisting an individual with anaphylactic shock. That's why a standard such as the one that we are proposing this afternoon with Motion 504 would give schools, whether it's the teacher, whether it's support staff, whether it's the principal, in case there was a condition or in case there was a reaction, time to react because time is of the essence, and it's important.

Now, students with this condition are no different than any other student. They play minor hockey. They play minor soccer. They're in the band in their local school. They're in the theatre groups. They go on field trips. They have sleepovers with their friends. They're no different. They're students. We have to consider that, please. If we could consider enhancing their safety, I think it would be a great step forward here in this province.

These life-threatening allergies appear to be on the rise in western cultures. There are some experts that speculate that this is due to improved hygienic standards. Now, I can't say whether that's fact or whether it's fiction, but certainly it is interesting. Individuals living with this condition, as I said earlier, must avoid contact with any agent or avoid all contacts with risk of a severe or life-threatening reaction. If it does occur, of course, most individuals have the EpiPen. They either have it in their possession, or it's in a locker, or it's in the corner of the teacher's desk. It could be in the principal's office, Mr. Speaker. But we have to know where that is, and we have to be able to find it and use it in a safe, effective manner, sometimes in 30 seconds or less, sometimes in less than a minute.

Now, other jurisdictions. In Ontario in 2003 a 13-year-old girl named Sabrina Shannon unknowingly ate french fries from the school cafeteria that had been contaminated with a dairy product. Sabrina went into shock and passed away before school staff could give her a dose from her EpiPen, which was stored in her locker. This is an example where in 2003 Ontario, of course, introduced

Sabrina's Law, which many of us here are familiar with. It was a private member's bill, Bill Pr. 3, and it was passed in the Ontario Legislature almost two years after Sabrina's unfortunate passing.

Now, Manitoba and British Columbia did it a little differently. Manitoba issued a directive in 2002 that required school divisions to create policies to protect students with anaphylaxis. A registered nurse was hired to assist boards in developing their policies, which was to be completed by 2004. However, Manitoba still opted to formalize this requirement in legislation by passing a private member's bill, moved by MLA Erin Selby, which was endorsed by the Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth. This legislation came into force on November 1, 2009. The amendments required all school boards to have policies in place that meet the needs of pupils who have diagnosed anaphylaxis and allowing for regulations to spell out the details in those plans.

It's interesting to note that both Manitoba and Ontario passed this anaphylaxis legislation with all-party support, Mr. Speaker.

Now, Alberta's approach to date has been distinctly different when compared to provinces such as Ontario, Manitoba, and British Columbia. The dates are fuzzy. Few people seem to know the specifics. But it appears that rather than pass legislation or issue regulations, the provincial government opted to create an advisory committee in 2006 to study the issue of anaphylaxis in schools. The committee was comprised of stakeholders such as the Alberta School Boards Association, Alberta Education, Allergy/Asthma Information Association, Alberta information centre, and Alberta Health.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, there is no specific legislation in Alberta requiring school boards to have policies in place regarding anaphylaxis. Thank you.

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

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today to speak to Motion 504, brought forward on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. There's no doubt that this is a serious issue. There is not one single member in this House that would ever stand to trivialize the dangers of anaphylactic allergies. Not one single member here. But I do have to take exception to the member who brings forward the motion, that suggests that there is a lack of standards, that there are no standards in this province whatsoever.

5:10

In fact, Mr. Speaker, just for a bit of a timeline, in 2006-2007 the Minister of Education provided a conditional grant to the Alberta School Boards Association, the ASBA, to lead a working group known as the anaphylaxis policy advisory steering committee. The ASBA anaphylaxis policy advisory steering committee included representatives from Alberta Education, the College of Alberta School Superintendents, Alberta School Councils' Association, Alberta School Boards Association, Anaphylaxis Canada, the Canadian Society of Allergy and Clinical Immunology, and parents of children who have severe, life-threatening allergies. A policy advisory was produced for school boards on how the safety of students with anaphylactic allergies can be addressed.

Now, then, the committee also recommended that school boards develop policies and procedures that allow for adaptations – adaptations – not static legislation, Mr. Speaker. The committee recommended adaptations to meet the needs within the local context of each school.

In 2007, Mr. Speaker, a resource was developed that would support schools in implementing the advisory policy. This involved bringing a team together with representation from Anaphylaxis

Canada, Alberta Asthma Centre, Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease & Asthma Network of Alberta, Allergy/Asthma Information Association, the Lung Association, the Canadian Society of Allergy and Clinical Immunology, and the original advisory group that was created to create the policy.

Then, Mr. Speaker, the allergy and anaphylaxis information response, AAIR for short, resource produced in English and in French was completed and distributed to public, separate, charter, private, francophone schools in Alberta in February of 2008. On March 11 of 2010 the AAIR resource was also distributed to First Nations. Now, keep in mind that it was distributed already to in excess of 2,000 public, separate, charter, private, and francophone schools and health authorities within the province of Alberta. That's pretty extensive.

In 2009 one final concern that schools and health professionals shared was in regard to the training of school communities. There were three issues that needed to be addressed. Those were inconsistent training, which was provided at the school level; the availability of health care professionals to go into schools, particularly in rural areas; and, of course, just-in-time training that schools requested.

Now, Alberta Education provided Anaphylaxis Canada with a conditional grant to develop a training program to address those three needs specifically for Alberta. The e-module that was created, Mr. Speaker, was recently piloted by the Canadian anaphylaxis readiness education program and reached over 200 teachers in Alberta. I believe that soon it's going to go province-wide.

The second strategy that came out of that, Mr. Speaker, was to make available training for health care professionals who work in school communities. Anaphylaxis Canada provides face-to-face training for them, all consistent policies throughout our school system. Again, there is not a lack of standards.

On January 19, 2010 – and I'll table this at the appropriate time – there was even a letter that was tabled by Judah A. Denburg, MD, scientific director, and Dr. Diana Royce, education director, managing director, and chief operating officer with AllerGen Canada, the allergy, genes, and environment network to the minister. On behalf of AllerGen research network I'd to congratulate Alberta Education for taking a leadership role with regard to education and training for school personnel on anaphylaxis and potentially life-threatening allergic conditions. AllerGen has been proud to help support some of the research and evaluation.

To our knowledge Alberta is one of the first provinces to embark on such a comprehensive and innovative anaphylaxis education program. In particular, the online training component represents an outstanding collaboration between province, policy-makers, health care providers, medical associations, consumer groups, McMaster University, and the organization that wrote the letter. We understand that other provinces are watching this initiative with great interest, in particular some of the innovative components such as the e-learning module, all designed to set standards in curriculum, in policy within school boards. Mr. Speaker, we in this province lead the country when it comes to anaphylaxis policy in dealing with students who have conditions.

The motion, I believe, includes strategies to reduce exposure to anaphylactic causative agents done at the policy level with school boards; information on life-threatening allergies done at the school boards and through the research programs that I'd outlined; a requirement for every school principal to develop a plan for each pupil affected by an anaphylactic allergy – I'll get to that in a minute; I think that's being addressed – including the maintenance of a file for each anaphylactic pupil. I'm not quite sure if every single principal is maintaining a file on every single student that has anaphylactic allergies, Mr. Speaker, but I don't know that having a file is necessarily guaranteeing somebody's life is being saved. It

might be beneficial. I don't know whether every principal is doing it or if they've adopted some other policy in place that keeps records and tracks them. I don't know if necessarily creating a file makes everybody safer.

The policies, Mr. Speaker, for anaphylactic allergies, students who have them, is in place. If this is legislated, I worry and wonder about the precedents that we're setting sometimes. If you legislate all of this, I don't know if it allows flexibility. The bigger question that you have to ask is: if we're going to put in legislation what's more appropriately dealt with in policy, what else do we need to legislate? Should we be legislating safety practices for football programs? Should it be in legislation exactly what sort of safety practices you're going to have for a football program or a hockey program? Are we going to put in legislation the safety protocols for playing on the playground over lunchtime rather than in school policy? How much do we actually have to put in legislation, and will it make us all safer?

Now, that leads me to one of my final points. I'm worried, Mr. Speaker, that sometimes when we create legislation, we give the impression that we've addressed everything, that it's all better now. We put in legislation the anaphylactic policy. Now no student will be harmed from the allergy that they have. Now, because it's in legislation, policy is obviously not consistent enough; we have to legislate it. I don't know that because it's in legislation, it guarantees anybody is more safe in any context. We legislate against murder, but it still happens. It doesn't stop accidents from happening, and it won't necessarily protect a student whose parents may, because it's in legislation, be less vigilant within the schools about managing their own situation. Principals may become less vigilant in managing the situation of their students. So I worry that as soon as we discuss legislation as being the solution, we may actually create more harm because everyone thinks it will be fixed.

Look. Think of it this way, Mr. Speaker. It is illegal to run a red light. It's in legislation that we can't run a red light. Does that mean that not one single person, when the light turns green, doesn't still look both ways once in a while just to make sure someone's coming? If we just assume that because it's illegal to run a red light, it's illegal to speed, then we don't need to watch anything. It makes everything safe. We can just legislate ourselves right into utopia. It's got to come down to the policies that are in practice in the schools.

We have excellent policies in place already in the schools, Mr. Speaker, and that's because the School Act fundamentally says that schools have to be safe and caring. They have to provide a safe environment. We have to legislate anaphylactic policy. We legislate against bullying. We legislate against – well, you name it. We can just legislate everything and make everybody safe.

The School Act says that we have to create safe and caring schools. Every single teacher, every single principal, every single student, every single parent works together on policies, procedures, and day-to-day operations to ensure that safety. Just because something might or might not be in legislation does not mean that it's weak because it's not in legislation or assured because it is. It all comes down to people and how vigilant they are and whether or not the actual day-to-day policies are in place.

Mr. Speaker, my last concern with this is that we become too rigid in our legislation about anaphylaxis policy. We always talk about how legislation is not adaptive or flexible or responsive to meet quick issues that might arise – new treatments, new policies, new procedures – so if we create legislation that may take two or three years and we have to have public consultations to get it changed, we may actually wind up with legislation in place that's more harmful to students or the situation in schools than it is good.

I encourage all members not to support this motion.

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

5:20

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I'm going to take a very personal approach to this motion. I'm going to suggest that if the hon. member's children suffered from these types of allergies and complications, he wouldn't have gotten up and made that statement. I'm going to provide a little bit of background detail first, and then I'm going to very much personalize this debate.

The advisory information resource, AAIR, prepared in '06-07, was simply mailed out to schools and school districts to use as they see fit. Officials from Education could not confirm that the department made any attempt to verify that these kits were actually received by school districts. They also were not sure if new schools constructed since the AAIR was originally distributed would be sent a kit. It was also not clear if the kits had been updated since the original mail-out. The responsibility for ensuring that the information contained in the kits is implemented rests with the school boards or the schools themselves.

A parent dissatisfied with a particular school's approach to anaphylaxis should have recourse to a provincial law to ensure that appropriate protections are in place. A higher standard of protection in our schools would also reduce the risk that school boards could be held liable for deaths resulting from severe anaphylactic shock. Emergency room visits, which cost our health system, could also be reduced.

Now, the argument that we just heard from the Member for Battle River-Wainwright is the same type of argument that we heard with regard to seat belts, the idea being that you can legislate them, but people don't necessarily have to wear them. That type of legislation may be appropriate if you're an adult and you choose, based on your safety issue, to defy the law and not wear a seat belt because you feel that you'd rather die than be crippled in an accident. You have, based on your age – and, I would also add, stupidity – a degree of choice. Children do not have that choice, and I'm going to speak as a grandfather. My grandson . . .

Mr. Lukaszuk: Wisdom comes with age.

Mr. Chase: Obviously, you don't have children, or you'd be more concerned.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, continue.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Sorry to be distracted by people who don't seem to care about the well-being of Alberta's children.

My grandson, Kiran Warrior, turned six this past February 22. He suffers from a degree of allergies which are compounded by the fact that he has rather severe asthma. Now, as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar indicated, that does not prevent him from participating to his fullest extent possible, but everywhere he goes, Mr. Speaker, the EpiPen accompanies him. For example, if I have the opportunity to take him to his hockey practice, I have to make sure that that EpiPen does not get left in the car because the cold affects the quality of the serum in the EpiPen, which is absolutely essential for my grandson's life.

Now, individuals talk about: you can't legislate the saving of a life. By having a common legislation and a common application throughout the province, which creates common expectations, common responsibilities, there is a better chance of the activities being taken into account. Now, most children, once they reach school age, carry their EpiPens with them in their packs or, as was

the sad case of the young lady in Ontario, Sabrina, may have the misfortune of leaving it in her locker. For the EpiPen to take effect, it has to be immediately available. That's why, as parents and grandparents and protectors of our grandson, we make sure we have that EpiPen always within our sight, whether it's taking our young grandson to the theatre, as we did on Friday night or, as I mentioned, to a hockey practice. That is a life-determining circumstance.

He has been tested for all kinds of allergies, but the tests don't necessarily reflect the severity of the circumstance. For example, he has no problems with almonds or cashews, but get him anywhere near peanuts and the swelling starts. We had no idea, for example, that he was allergic to macadamia nuts till he happened to have some icing which barely touched the macadamia nuts, and that caused his throat to swell, his eyes to swell. Fortunately, we were able to give him Benadryl right on the spot, and the EpiPen wasn't required.

This is life and death. To be as cavalier as suggesting that we could actually damage the protection of children by having universally required legislation across this province ignores the importance of protecting our children. Again, I'm a big fan of the Member for the Battle River-Wainwright region, and I know that he's a good father and a loving husband. I'm sure that he was a very professional teacher, and that's one of the reasons I have such respect for him. But as a teacher he should realize the number of kids that we have in our classrooms and in our schools with a whole series of menacing and, in some cases, life-threatening conditions.

The hon. member mentioned just our desire to have everything absolutely clean and sterile, where kids no longer, you know, put in that mouthful of dirt that builds up the antibodies and so on over the long run. The reality is that our kids are in danger, and more and more are placed in that danger. If you go into any school, you would be absolutely amazed, on the board by the principal's office or wherever it's chosen to be displayed to protect the privacy of the child, at the number of kids who suffer from a variety of things, whether it's diabetes, whether it's anaphylactic shock, whether it's allergies. The number of asthma, pulmonary concerns in Alberta far outnumber any other province. It's a real problem, and the hon. member is trying to come up with a real solution. It's not the end-all answer, but unless we take some form of standardized procedural policy development and enforcement, we're going to lose children.

Now, my wife, myself, my daughter, her husband, everybody in our family will do everything to protect our grandson, and we'll do everything to ensure that when he's on a field trip, he carries his EpiPen with him. We will make sure that we inform the school authorities. We'll make sure that when he's on a sleepover, he has that EpiPen with him. The point is that he's going to be spending a significant part of his day in school, and if the most well-meaning and well-intentioned teachers don't know where his EpiPen is, that could mean the difference between life or death for my grandson. That's the case for thousands of Alberta children.

When you're arguing against the possibility of protecting children, I don't get it, Mr. Speaker. It's absolutely essential that we do everything within our power for the well-being of children. Opposing this makes absolutely no sense. I wonder where a person's brain or where their heart is or, in fact, if they have one if they oppose this legislation.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, I particularly take offence to the last comment, and I will try and qualify it. First of all, I do want to say that I am an individual who has a severe allergy to all types of nuts. I have EpiPens. I do want to say that the regulations that have been brought forward have probably caused me and many people who have allergies more challenges than if nothing was done.

Now, you say to me: how does that make sense? Well, first of all, I do want to say that the schools do a lot of work as it is right now, and I commend them for that. But let's talk about the situation that we're in as individuals who have those types of allergies.

5:30

The world becomes complacent. How does it become complacent? Because we as a society need to protect everybody, we're protecting people or we're protecting ourselves, if I want to call it that, against situations where we need to be ready for the situation. If we have a school that completely bans nuts, if I was a child, I'd become quite complacent in the attitude of saying: "You know what? There are no nuts here, so I have no worry. Nobody is going to put nuts in somebody's cookies. I can share." We need to teach the individuals who have those conditions that they have that responsibility on their own, and it's critical.

Now, I'm going to give you another example. If you take a look at cereals or you take a look at bars, what happened? In order to protect themselves, companies have stated: this product may contain traces of nuts. If you have a grandson that has an allergy, that's very frustrating. Why is it frustrating? Because those individuals are protecting themselves from liability, and now all of a sudden every product and every cereal that you buy has that sign on it. You become oblivious to that signage because they all may. So you don't eat cereal. You don't eat, you know, certain products. You know that these products don't have nuts, so you eat them anyway. That's what I'm talking about: complacency. Well, cornflakes may contain nuts. You know that it doesn't contain nuts. It's done from the legality point of view instead of the common-sense point of view.

I say to you that when I look at students in schools, when we look at individuals in society, we have to be prepared. We have to be ready, whether we carry an EpiPen or, I guess, whatever type of precautions we take. It's necessary that we educate the individuals themselves. I'm very confident that what's been provided in schools is very adequate. I just don't think that if we take that step further, we are helping. In some cases I think we could be deterring what we're trying to do because of the complacency side.

I can only speak on my behalf and only on what I went through not only discovering the allergies that I do have but also trying to deal with them. You know, I can say to you – and I'll use an example right here, that happened in this building – that there was a situation where there was a meeting, and there was some food. What took place is that they thought it was important that we identify which product has nuts, and the individual who was ahead of me was looking at the food, moved the sign from one to the other. I was right behind him, and I saw it and basically said: exactly what are you doing? He said that he didn't even know he'd done it.

I think I can say to you, hon. member, that no matter what the sign is, no matter what the regulation is, no matter what we're doing, the onus is on ourselves first. Can we support? Yes, there are ways to support, but we can't go overboard because we can't put our children in the situation of complacency.

Thank you very much.

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

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to stand today and support this Motion 504. I see the points being made on both sides, and I think there are some good points. I don't dispute that they're genuinely held. I've seen, as many of us in this Chamber have seen, situations where we've had friends or family members with severe allergies – it usually seems to be with nuts, but it can be other things – have kind of near-death experiences or real

scary situations happen when they don't have their EpiPen or whatever they're using. It can be really scary.

I remember one scary situation for me. I was in Taiwan at the time. I was with an individual from the United States, and we were kind of going around. We were out for dinner, and we were eating. He thought it was nut free, and then he saw on the bottom of his plate a nut. I remember that he almost went into shock without actually going into shock. It turned out it was a false alarm, but he was just very scared because he didn't have his EpiPen with him. It was a very scary situation.

I know that these things do happen in schools. Things get missed. You know, as a parent sometimes things get left behind, like knapsacks. You can be good 99.9 per cent of the time, but sometimes things get missed. When those situations occur, the consequences can be dire. If there's a way we can increase the safety for these children by doing something relatively simple – I don't think we need to overdo it or overkill it – if we can at least make sure that the school boards and the schools are mandated to have a plan in place and to know who the people are, I think that's just good planning on their part.

I think it can be done with very minimal regulation. I think it's one of those things where, again, when the government does want to regulate and does want to step in, it should be for public safety, for things like this. I do think that the good outweighs the bad, so I will be supporting this bill. I've also had several e-mails on it from constituents with children who have this allergy, and they've been relaying their scary stories to me about it. On their behalf I will be supporting this motion.

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

Dr. Taft: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to note that there have been some family members and a few moments ago there were several children in the gallery. I'd welcome them. I'm glad they're here to watch the debate and listen to the positions of the various people.

I just want to reread the motion so that we're really clear here. I listened to the comments from the Minister of Infrastructure, and I just want to be clear here. We're not talking about a ban on peanuts or anything like that. Here's the exact wording of the motion:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to introduce legislation requiring all school boards to establish and maintain an anaphylactic policy that includes strategies to reduce exposure to anaphylactic causative agents, information on life-threatening allergies, annual first aid training on dealing with life-threatening allergies, and a requirement for every school principal to develop a plan for each pupil affected by an anaphylactic allergy, including the maintenance of a file for each anaphylactic pupil.

That's the end of the motion.

When I read this, Mr. Speaker, I'm kind of reminded of fire drills and fire escape plans. This isn't a bill that says: ban all peanuts or all anaphylactic agents from a school. This is a motion that says: "Be prepared. Know who is at high risk. Make sure that once a year that file is reviewed and there's a bit of training in place. Make sure you have the adequate equipment. Take some precautions." That's really what this is saying, and I think we need to keep it in that perspective.

I say this as somebody who, very fortunately, doesn't have allergies, so I personally don't have these concerns, but sadly I know people who do. Very good friends of one of my sisters lost a child to an anaphylactic allergy reaction, and I know a number of people who have similar life-and-death threats. I was a camp counsellor once where a student had anaphylactic shock because, even though we asked him, he never told anybody he was allergic to peanuts.

The camp cook put a tiny bit of peanuts in the Cocoa Puffs squares. He ate them, and he was down. We were an hour from any medical help. We were way west of Rocky Mountain House. That was quite frightening. So I have had experience with this with other people.

5:40

I'm sure that over the years these kinds of debates have gone back and forth and back and forth. I think that as a Legislature it's reasonable for us to say: well, do we really need this law? Is this law really going to be effective? Could it, as the Minister of Infrastructure said, be counterproductive? I have no doubt. In fact, I've been here long enough to remember the debates on bicycle helmets. You know, there was back and forth, and for years and years the government voted down legislation to require kids to wear bicycle helmets. Well, you know what? It was brought forward. It's done. We have undoubtedly saved any number of injuries to kids because they have to wear bike helmets. A similar debate on seat belts: I think Alberta was the last province in the country to bring forward seat belts.

This is an issue that's going to be in a similar vein. One of the concerns I have – and other members have mentioned this – is around liability issues. There will come a point now where it's widely known that there are serious allergy problems and that steps can be taken. When authorities do not take those steps, I expect that they will be increasingly exposed to liability. It may not just be the authorities as the school boards. It could be teachers. It could be other families. Why not take the step now and prevent this from becoming that kind of a big issue?

We're watching the same issue play out in air travel. I believe WestJet has stopped serving any kind of peanut products on its flights. You know what? It's not a big deal. It showed me, when I read this article, that WestJet is being very proactive and responsive to the health needs of their customers. In contrast, Air Canada is dragging its heels and resisting making the changes that are necessary. I think it looks bad on Air Canada, and I wouldn't be surprised if it increases their liability risks.

I think that when we consider our roles as legislators in setting standards and leading by example in protecting children, we have to remember that here we're not talking about adults. We're talking about kids who could be as young as four years old, in kindergarten, kids who don't have full choice, who don't have full knowledge. I think the Member for Lethbridge-East might speak in a few minutes to an example from Vancouver Island, a particularly unfortunate example in a school. These are children. We have a responsibility to take reasonable steps to reduce the extreme risks to our children.

I'm sure this debate will play out over and over and over in this Assembly, consuming all kinds of hours, and probably any number of children will suffer because of these delays. Eventually, at some point in the future the government will realize that, yeah, we should do this, just like we do with fire drills. We require every school to have a fire exit plan, to once or twice or three times a year have a fire drill. No big deal. We all think it's a reasonable idea. Why not do the same with allergies?

I support this motion, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much.

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

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to weigh in on this debate. Certainly, there have been good arguments, actually, on both sides. But I think that one of the things we have to keep in mind – and this government often does this. They'll have these wonderful programs. They announce them with great fanfare. Then they download those programs onto the stakeholders and those

that are responsible for delivering those programs, but they often don't give them the dollars that are required to have those programs go forward. It is bit of a pattern, and certainly I've noticed it at the municipal level.

In this case it's the anaphylactic program, which I'm sure was launched with the greatest of intentions and knowledge that this type of information must be in all the schools. The question would arise in my mind that you introduce a program without any time frames for evaluations. How is this working? Are all of the schools doing it? The other question that I would have on this is: is this a standard program throughout the schools? Is it being applied in the same fashion? Children move in this province all the time.

One of the arguments was made that children are responsible, you know, for themselves, and they understand that, and I do understand that. Young children who have juvenile diabetes know exactly how to use their needles. They know exactly how much insulin they need. They know that if they're tired, they're going to need some orange juice. Yes, they do know these things. Children with allergies often are aware of what they are as well, but we're talking about kids, and kids sometimes forget. They get themselves into little situations without having thought.

My thrust on this would be that we have to help little children who, yes, may well know what they have to do, but they're kids, and they forget. It is very easy to give an Epi-Pen, and often some of them may have them as they would have their insulin supplies, but teachers are not health care workers. I believe that for them to have basic knowledge is easily taught because what their basic knowledge must be is that they can recognize the signs and symptoms of a true allergic reaction.

The point is that whoever is teaching these children, in the school room or outside of the school room, in the play yard, has to recognize the signs and symptoms and then be able to put in whatever their protocol is. My problem, as I've mentioned, I think, is that the protocol hasn't been evaluated. It's just been sent out and said: well, we hope you do this. And, again, I don't believe that it's standardized across the province. I think it's very important.

One of the other things that can easily happen to children when they're out playing are bee stings or wasp stings. They can be very, very highly deadly for the children who are allergic to those. Again, it's the question of the teacher being able to recognize the signs and symptoms of an anaphylactic shock and knowing what to do. If it's a child that may never have had that reaction before, again, I hope that teacher recognizes the signs and symptoms and gets help right away. It doesn't take long to die from an anaphylactic shock.

One of the reasons I'm saying this is because I think part of the big problem – I can certainly speak from the long-term care side of it – is that each regional health authority had its own version and its own analysis and its own assessment of what was considered long-term care. That care was not consistent across the province, and it was very important because, again, seniors move across this province just as our young children do.

Just before I finish, I would like to talk about a very unfortunate incident that happened at a Vancouver Island school. There was a young man, and kids were bullying. It was a classic case of bullying, where there were four young men chasing another young man. They told him that they were throwing peanuts at him, and he had a very severe reaction to peanuts. It was a clear case of bullying. I think it's most unfortunate that, of course, that was used. I'm sure that these other four thought it was a lark and this kid's going to react when he thought he had peanuts, but if they really understood the life-and-death situation that they could have been putting this young man in, I'm sure they would have thought twice.

Often what I get back from the other side of this room is: education, education, education. Clearly, what you've tried to do is send out kits that are, in quotations, education, but there isn't the evaluation with it. There isn't the fact that anyone knows, and I think that it should be a directive that can go out to the school boards. I realize that school boards are autonomous, and so they should be, but I think that when it's health and wellness, it comes under a different criteria that we should be looking at to protect our children.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

5:50

The Deputy Speaker: Any hon. member wish to speak?

Seeing none, the chair shall now recognize the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are a few words I'd like to say. First of all, I want to thank the hon. member for bringing this motion forward because, obviously, it's generated a very valuable debate here, and although members may not be all together on how they see the most appropriate solution, I think it's still been very valuable to raise consciousness about this issue.

I really think that what we are talking about here is the method not so much as the end. As was mentioned by an earlier speaker, there is nobody in this Assembly who would be arguing against the need to have students as safe as can be in schools. But I think my concern about the motion is just that – well, I guess I'll just say that I'm a diabetic. Now, I was fortunate. I got juvenile diabetes when I was 28 years old, but I can imagine what it must be like for a young person, a young child, having to take insulin and being fearful of reactions and so on in school when they're young. I was fortunate to have missed that, but I guess my concern is that there are all kinds of risks, there are all kinds of threats out there, and specific legislation, a specific section dealing with specific risks, as dangerous as they are, I think, may cause some problem.

For example, I don't think we have – and I stand to be corrected on this – a section in the act that talks about fire drills. There is a requirement to keep students safe, and we've already got that requirement. I was trying to listen carefully to some of the other precedents that were mentioned, and if I'm not mistaken, some of them were not done in legislation. They were done by ministerial order. I think, really, what we're talking about is how we implement this process that we all feel is valuable.

Those are my only comments, but if I am to vote against this motion, that would be why, certainly not because I don't appreciate the challenges that people with allergies face.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The chair recognizes the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar to close the debate.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to, first off, thank all hon. members for their contributions in this debate and discussion on Motion 504 this afternoon. Certainly, we need to, before we vote, clarify some of the previous statements that were made.

I'm not confident that every school board in our province has a well-developed anaphylaxis policy in place as was suggested by the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright. Now, I was provided – and I really appreciated this from the former Minister of Education – the advice to the minister under anaphylaxis students with severe allergies, which was advice to the Minister of Education at the time on March 14, 2007. For the record, there was \$25,000 granted by Alberta Education to the Alberta School Boards Association to lead a working group on this issue. Now, the working group, or the

committee, was responsible for developing a policy advisory – a policy advisory, Mr. Speaker. A school policy advisory was drafted, and it was reviewed by the committee members. There is a big difference between a policy and a policy advisory. A policy advisory is simply the paper it's written on. It's an advisory. It's not a set standard across the province. I would urge all hon. members to consider this when they vote.

Now, there was talk about self-compliance: it works better than legislation. I would remind you that the Assemblies in Manitoba, Ontario, and with all due respect British Columbia have decided that self-compliance in this matter doesn't work.

The backgrounder that was provided to me also indicates that the policy advisory is the responsibility of the Alberta School Boards Association and, therefore, does not require departmental or ministerial approval. The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright suggested that the government had all this under control. If I heard him right, I would certainly take exception to that and point out that section 45(8) of the School Act states that the school boards have the responsibility for providing students in their schools with a safe and caring environment. Developing local policies and procedures is their local responsibility. That's what we're after here, a policy that each school board can implement through this legislation.

Now, Mr. Speaker, when we consider what is going on in this province, Alberta needs to pass legislation requiring every school to have a well-developed anaphylaxis policy. Children with this condition deserve to have a consistent standard of protection in each and every school. Currently, parents must choose between enrolling children in schools that meet the geographic and educational needs of their family or risking placing their children in a school without proper safety standards. A parent should not have to lobby an individual school or district to create appropriate policies and practices to protect their children.

Some parents may not even be aware of the danger of life-threatening allergies, and schools have a responsibility to ensure that all students are as safe as they can be. This motion, Mr. Speaker, that we are proposing before the Assembly: we are moving it because we want to provide and build on the good work that's already being done by schools and school boards across the province and make sure that it's a standard across the province.

Now, a school board has the ability to develop policies regarding anaphylaxis, and these policies may or may not conform with this policy advisory that the hon. member spoke about earlier issued by the stakeholder committee. If a particular board chooses not to create a policy – and this is very important – then the responsibility rests with the individual school. If a school board chooses not to create a policy, it is up to the principal of a school to create and enforce policies on anaphylaxis.

Time did not permit us in the Official Opposition a full examination of school districts in Alberta, but it is clear that the absence of provincial legislation has left serious gaps in the school system. For example, the Edmonton school district, with a projected enrolment in this year of close to 79,000 students, does not have a board-level policy in place on anaphylaxis, and this was confirmed in a phone call to us by school board officials. The Calgary board of education, by contrast, has a detailed policy on anaphylaxis that is posted on their website. So it's not all as what was claimed earlier by the hon. member.

I would in conclusion urge all members of this Assembly to please accept this motion. It will be a small step in the right direction towards providing each and every student, regardless of whether they have an allergy or not, that is enrolled in our school system the utmost in safety.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Before the chair calls the question, the hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to request unanimous consent of the House to record a standing vote for this motion but to waive the normal 10-minute bell period.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Deputy Speaker: The chair shall now call the question, and if there is a standing vote, it'll be one minute.

[The voice vote indicated that Motion Other than Government Motion 504 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 6 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson
Calahasen
Chase

Hayden
Horner
Lindsay

MacDonald
Pastoor
Taft

Against the motion:

Amery
Bhullar
Campbell
Dallas
Danyluk
Denis
Doerksen
Elniski

Fritz
Horne
Jablonski
Jacobs
Knight
Leskiw
Lukaszuk
Marz

McFarland
Olson
Prins
Quest
Rodney
VanderBurg
Vandermeer

Totals:

For – 9

Against – 23

[Motion Other than Government Motion 504 lost]

[The Assembly adjourned at 6:06 p.m. to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

Table of Contents

Introduction of Visitors	441
Members' Statements	
Academy of Learning and Digital School	442
Kevin Koe Rink Brier Championship	442
Calgary International Airport Development	442
Clean Energy Projects	443
Foster Care	451
Capital Region Board	452
Value of Oil and Gas Industry	452
Oral Question Period	
Competitiveness Review of Oil and Gas Industry	443, 445
Oil and Gas Royalties	443
Construction and Manufacturing Outsourcing	444
Provincial Deficit	444
Environmental Monitoring and Reporting	445
Competitiveness Review Impact on Employment	445, 446
Farm Worker Safety	446
Activity-based Funding Model for Hospital Care	447
Royalties for Unconventional Oil	447
Centralized Cytology Lab Services	448
Swan Hills Treatment Centre	448
Private Postsecondary Institutions	448
Funding for Private Schools	449
Alberta Schools Alternative Procurement Program	449
School Closures	450
Country of Origin Labelling	450
English Bay Provincial Recreation Area	451
Home-baked Pies for MLAs	451
Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees	452
Tabling Returns and Reports	452
Tablings to the Clerk	453
Written Questions	
Culture and Community Spirit Consultant Costs	453
Environment Consultant Costs	453
Advanced Education and Technology Consultant Costs	453
Children and Youth Services Consultant Costs	453
Education Consultant Costs	453
Tourism, Parks and Recreation Consultant Costs	453
Justice Consultant Costs	453
Solicitor General and Public Security Consultant Costs	453
Calgary Mental Health Diversion Project	453
Infrastructure Consultant Costs	453
Service Alberta Consultant Costs	453
Transportation Consultant Costs	454
FOIP Information Requests	454
Employment and Immigration Consultant Costs	454
Finance and Enterprise Consultant Costs	454
Treasury Board Consultant Costs	454
Agriculture and Rural Development Consultant Costs	454
International and Intergovernmental Relations Consultant Costs	454
Seniors and Community Supports Consultant Costs	454
Executive Council Consultant Costs	454
Aboriginal Relations Consultant Costs	454
Health and Wellness Consultant Costs	454
Zoo Standards	454
Energy Consultant Costs	454
Housing and Urban Affairs Consultant Costs	454
Municipal Affairs Consultant Costs	454
Education Sole-source Contracts	454
Postsecondary Institution Student Loans	454
Assistance for Pork Producers	454
Mental Illness in Inmate Population	454
HIV in Inmate Population	455

Hepatitis in Inmate Population	455
Physical Disabilities in Inmate Population	455
Restaurant Inspections	455
PDD Community Board Budgets	455
Long-term Care Wait-lists	455
Provincially Funded Affordable Housing	456
Employment of Registered Nurses	457
Overtime Hours of Registered Nurses	459
Motions for Returns	
Edmonton Security Operations Branch	460
Calgary Security Operations Branch	460
Mountain Pine Beetles	460
Sour Gas Release in Lodgepole Area	461
Natural Gas Valuations	461
Alberta Hospital Edmonton Implementation Team	463
Acute Care Bed Closures	464
Labour Protection for Paid Farm Workers	465
Asset-backed Commercial Paper	466
Long-Term Investment Strategies	466
Motions Other than Government Motions	
Anaphylaxis Policy for Schools	467

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Lund
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Taft
Weadick
Woo-Paw

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Health**

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Groeneveld
Horne
Lindsay
Notley
Olson
Quest
Sherman
Taft
Vandermeer

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Cao
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Sandhu
Xiao

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