



Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, May 7, 2013

Issue 54a

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

First Session

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Bhardwaj, Naresh, Edmonton-Ellerslie (PC)
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Fenske, Jacquie, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (PC)
Forsyth, Heather, Calgary-Fish Creek (W)
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Fraser, Rick, Calgary-South East (PC)
Fritz, Yvonne, Calgary-Cross (PC)
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Griffiths, Hon. Doug, Battle River-Wainwright (PC)
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Hancock, Hon. Dave, QC, Edmonton-Whitemud (PC),
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Horner, Hon. Doug, Spruce Grove-St. Albert (PC)
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Jansen, Sandra, Calgary-North West (PC)
Jeneroux, Matt, Edmonton-South West (PC)
Johnson, Hon. Jeff, Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater (PC)
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Klimchuk, Hon. Heather, Edmonton-Glenora (PC)
Kubinec, Maureen, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (PC)
Lemke, Ken, Stony Plain (PC)
Leskiw, Genia, Bonnyville-Cold Lake (PC)
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McAllister, Bruce, Chestermere-Rocky View (W)
McDonald, Everett, Grande Prairie-Smoky (PC)
McIver, Hon. Ric, Calgary-Hays (PC),
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Pedersen, Blake, Medicine Hat (W)
Quadri, Sohail, Edmonton-Mill Woods (PC)
Quest, Dave, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (PC)
Redford, Hon. Alison M., QC, Calgary-Elbow (PC),
 Premier
Rodney, Hon. Dave, Calgary-Lougheed (PC)
Rowe, Bruce, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (W)
Sandhu, Peter, Edmonton-Manning (PC)
Sarich, Janice, Edmonton-Decore (PC)
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 Leader of the Official Opposition
Starke, Hon. Dr. Richard, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC)
Stier, Pat, Livingstone-Macleod (W)
Strankman, Rick, Drumheller-Stettler (W)
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)
Towle, Kerry, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (W),
 Official Opposition Deputy Whip
VanderBurg, Hon. George, Whitecourt-Ste. Anne (PC)
Weadick, Hon. Greg, Lethbridge-West (PC)
Webber, Len, Calgary-Foothills (PC)
Wilson, Jeff, Calgary-Shaw (W)
Woo-Paw, Hon. Teresa, Calgary-Northern Hills (PC)
Xiao, David H., Edmonton-McClung (PC)
Young, Steve, Edmonton-Riverview (PC),
 Government Whip

Party standings:

Progressive Conservative: 61

Wildrose: 17

Alberta Liberal: 5

New Democrat: 4

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STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Amery
Deputy Chair: Mr. Fox

Bhardwaj	Olesen
Cao	Pastoor
Donovan	Quadri
Dorward	Rogers
Eggen	Rowe
Hehr	Sarich
Luan	Strankman
McDonald	Xiao

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mr. Khan
Deputy Chair: Mrs. Jablonski

Anderson
Casey
Dorward
Eggen
Kubinec
Sandhu
Sherman

Select Special Chief Electoral Officer Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Rogers
Deputy Chair: Mr. Quadri

Blakeman	Leskiw
Eggen	McDonald
Goudreau	Saskiw
Lemke	

Select Special Conflicts of Interest Act Review Committee

Chair: Mr. Allen
Deputy Chair: Mr. Luan

Blakeman	Notley
Dorward	Saskiw
Fenske	Wilson
Johnson, L.	Young
McDonald	

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Mr. Quest
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Brown	Jeneroux
Cusanelli	Leskiw
DeLong	Notley
Fraser	Pedersen
Fritz	Swann
Goudreau	Towle
Jablonski	Wilson
Jansen	Young

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Cao
Deputy Chair: Mr. McDonald

Bikman	Leskiw
Blakeman	Quadri
Brown	Rogers
DeLong	Wilson
Eggen	

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Zwozdesky
Deputy Chair: Mr. Rogers

Casey	Mason
Forsyth	McDonald
Fraser	Quest
Kennedy-Glans	Sherman
Glans	Smith

Standing Committee on Private Bills

Chair: Mr. Xiao
Deputy Chair: Ms L. Johnson

Barnes	Jablonski
Bhardwaj	Leskiw
Brown	Notley
Cusanelli	Olesen
DeLong	Rowe
Fox	Strankman
Fritz	Swann
Goudreau	Webber

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Ms Olesen
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Calahasen	McAllister
Cao	Notley
Casey	Pedersen
Hehr	Rogers
Jansen	Sandhu
Kennedy-Glans	Saskiw
Kubinec	Towle
Luan	Young

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Mr. Anderson
Deputy Chair: Mr. Dorward

Allen	Hehr
Amery	Jeneroux
Anglin	Khan
Bilous	Pastoor
Donovan	Quadri
Fenske	Quest
Goudreau	Sarich
Hale	Stier

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Ms Kennedy-Glans
Deputy Chair: Mr. Anglin

Allen	Hale
Barnes	Johnson, L.
Bikman	Khan
Bilous	Kubinec
Blakeman	Lemke
Calahasen	Sandhu
Casey	Stier
Fenske	Webber

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, May 7, 2013

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Hon. members, let us pray. Life is truly precious, and the freedom to live it in a free and democratic way is something that we owe to those who sacrificed their precious lives in defence of that freedom which we enjoy today. Let us remember them, let us uphold what they stood for, and let us be ever thankful. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: We have school groups to introduce first. The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly the grade 6 class from Michael A. Kostek school in Edmonton-McClung along with their chaperones, Mrs. Paula O'Conner, Mr. Bob Shulko, and Ms Cynthia Smalley, and parents Mrs. Yip and Mrs. Rempel. I would ask the group of students to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Are there other school groups?

Let us move on, then. The Associate Minister of Finance.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today. The first is a very good member of my family, my youngest brother, Wade, who was a member of my constituency but has since moved to the city of Airdrie. He's here today to take in the festivities of question period. He was a tireless supporter of mine over the last two elections, doing everything from going door-knocking with me to pounding in signs. He's a journeyman plumber and works for a company called Larmco Mechanical as a project supervisor. I'm very proud of all of his accomplishments, and I'd ask Wade to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you a couple of members of the Department of Finance that have worked very tirelessly on the pooled registered pension plans legislation, that we debated in second reading yesterday. They're here to watch question period and debate in Committee of the Whole on this piece of legislation. I'd like to ask Ellen Nygaard and Adam Bailey to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The Minister of Aboriginal Relations.

Mr. Campbell: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to stand here today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Jed Johns. Originally from Fort Vermilion and a member of the Sucker Creek First Nation Jed is a student ministerial intern in my office. Currently he's studying political science at Grant MacEwan. Jed is also president of the students' association at MacEwan University and vice-chair of the Alberta Students' Executive Council. He's excited to be here, and we're excited to have him. He will be a great addition to the

Aboriginal Relations team. He's seated in the members' gallery. I would ask Jed to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mr. McAllister: Mr. Speaker, thank you. It gives me great pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a great leader in the community of Chestermere. He is one of the most prominent and influential people, I think, in my hometown because of his commitment to community and also his faith. He is Reverend John Nemanic. Reverend John does a great job serving his congregation, and he gets involved in community, too. In fact, he's planning on climbing a mountain to help raise funds to build a church in the town of Chestermere. He backs up his faith with deeds, and I am proud to know him. I would ask Reverend John to rise. As he does, he has a couple of guests with him today, friends of his, Linda and Andy Fehr, who are with us from Saskatchewan. I would ask my colleagues in the Legislature to give Reverend John and Linda and Andy a nice warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Hughes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly two university students who will be working out of my ministerial office this summer, Aurora Pounder, who is a political science student at the University of Alberta; and Jessica Mitchell, who is a policy studies student at Mount Royal University. I would ask that they please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you. It's my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Raja Abbas, director of the Pakistan Canada Association and also a well-known friend of the Pakistan and Indian community; Raja's daughter Umbreen Abbas, who is visiting from Paris, France; his son-in-law Amir Fayyaz; Syed Shahrazi, who is a media person travelling with them; and Jagdish Nischal, who is a well-known personality in the Edmonton Indian community. I also call him Uncle Jagdish. They are seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker. I would ask all my guests to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. Donovan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly Alison Lee, a grade 10 student from Coaldale and a brave teen who has shed light on sexual abuse in Alberta. She is a strong advocate against this. Also in the gallery is Mr. Ryan Gateman, who is also a grade 10 student, from my hometown of Mossleigh. He was a great door-knocker during my campaign, and his mom was my manager for a well-won election there. I'd like to ask them both to stand and receive the warm traditional welcome of this House.

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

Mr. Young: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two gentlemen who are in town for meetings and will be attending the Alberta

Emergency Management international working group on interoperability, Mr. Mario Beauchamp and Mr. Scott LeFevre. I'd ask that they receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a great honour to introduce to you and through you to all hon. members two guests, seated above me in the members' gallery, from my diverse constituency of Drumheller-Stettler. Gordon Butler is a long-time friend of mine and is responsible for my initial involvement with the Wildrose. His father, Jack, served as a visionary MLA in this Assembly under Premier Peter Lougheed from 1975 to 1979. I'd also like to introduce Ken Perreault, another long-time friend of mine and a long-time Reformer in the area and in the constituency. He was president of the Crowfoot constituency association for the Reform Party of Canada, the Canadian Alliance, and then the Conservative Party of Canada. I continue to rely on the guidance, vision, and friendship of both Gordon and Ken, and I ask my hon. colleagues to please give them the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there others? Hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, one more?

Mr. Young: Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a person we all know, Rory Koopmans, who is not only a prolific blogger but a political fan. So, Rory.

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

Mr. Quadri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to rise today and introduce to you my youth VP of the PC association of Mill Woods, Daniel Rose, who is observing QP and all of the process. I would ask Daniel Rose to please rise and receive our warm traditional welcome.

The Speaker: Are there others?

If not, let me close off this portion by begging your indulgence to introduce 82 students from 59 different constituencies who are all here as participants in Mr. Speaker's MLA for a Day program. Hon. members, as a result of your help, we set a record for the most applications received under this program ever, 110 to be exact. These participants are here to learn about your role, your job as an MLA, and they are being very well cared for by the Royal Canadian Legion reps, whom I'll introduce to you shortly.

1:40

These students have now toured the Legislature. They've dined with their MLA. They've met privately with their MLA in their offices. They've debated a motion in this Assembly, and they sat in your chairs. I presided over that session. There were things to be learned from it, and they did very well. Later today they will be taking part in a special workshop with Elections Alberta officials.

I want to commend the Royal Canadian Legion Alberta-NWT Command for their ongoing support for chaperoning the program and for their cosponsorship, without which none of this would be possible. And I want to thank our own Sergeant-at-Arms for his stewardship from our end. Thank you, sir.

Seated in my gallery today are the following individuals. Mrs. Audrey Ferguson, who is the district commander, Alberta-NWT Command, and our head chaperone for this year. Please stay standing. She's accompanied by student chaperones from the

Alberta-NWT Command of the Royal Canadian Legion: Mr. Bill Fecteau, Ms LeeAnn Leaburn, Ms Delores Thibault, Mrs. Sharon Charlet, Mr. Dave Basham, and Mrs. Laberta Basham. If you'd stay standing for a moment. Now let me ask all of our MLAs for a Day, who are seated in both galleries, to please rise. Colleagues, let us thank all of these individuals for their outstanding support. I have no doubt that in future years we'll see some of them sitting in this Assembly for real. They are quite a good group. Thank you, all.

Members' Statements

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

New School Construction

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today in recognition of Education Week taking place from May 6 to 10. I thought: how fitting would it be to provide a little bit of a history lesson? Premier Duff Roblin of Manitoba many years ago, in the '60s, dug a ditch through Manitoba, and when he dug that ditch through Manitoba, many of the people there criticized him. They said it wasn't worth it. There wasn't enough political capital in the area and what a waste of money. Well, he had foresight, he had a plan, and he's saved that province and the city over \$10 billion to date. He should be commended for having a plan and foresight, and I'm proud to serve under a Premier who has the same vision.

We saw that. In this Education Week we are celebrating 30 new school projects to be built in 19 growing communities across Alberta. These new schools will ensure that these kids in these communities can access a world-class education in modern, student-friendly learning environments. I was excited to participate in the announcement in Calgary, Mr. Speaker. It was a tremendous day for my constituency as they needed schools. They were happy to participate. They were happy to bring their kids out to these events. They should celebrate. It's their future that we're celebrating.

The Premier made a commitment to build new schools, and she's doing that. Mr. Speaker, it's just the beginning. Over the next three years this government will invest over \$500 million to support the delivery of new schools through public-private partnerships as well as traditional methods. It's a promise that we made, and it's a promise that we're keeping.

We are building Alberta and putting kids first. I look forward to 2016, when I can walk through the doors of these schools with these students in my constituency for the very first time. I hope they look back and realize how much money we saved, and I hope they realize that we had a plan. We're going to build this province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, followed by Calgary-Hawkwood.

Political Party Donations

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week's ruling by Elections Alberta sanctioning political party donations that exceed legal contribution limits has further eroded Albertans' confidence in the democratic process. With limits on corporate and union donations already at sky-high levels, Alberta's flimsy elections laws were even further relaxed when Elections Alberta decided that it was perfectly legal to exceed limits with "bulk" donations.

Mr. Speaker, it's no wonder why voter cynicism is on the rise and voter turnout is plummeting. Elections and government shouldn't be for sale to the highest bidder. Your ability to be heard shouldn't depend on the size of your wallet. Yet those are precisely the messages Alberta's elections laws communicate to voters.

Mr. Speaker, there's a simple way to fix this, a quick and easy change that would immediately restore voter confidence in the system and remove the appearance of buying influence: ban corporate and union donations. By prohibiting large corporations and unions with deep pockets from donating to political parties, we would make a big step towards giving elections back to whom they belong, the voters. When this House was amending elections legislation last year, the Wildrose put forward amendments to close the bulk donations loophole and ban corporate and union donations. To nobody's surprise, the government voted them down.

There's a reason several Canadian jurisdictions, including the federal government under the leadership of Prime Minister Harper, have moved to get big money out of politics. Governments are accountable to voters, not corporations. By opening the door to U.S.-style political action committees that can exceed contribution limits with bulk donations, this government has dealt another blow to the fairness and integrity of Alberta's electoral system.

But the government can still fix this. They can send the message that influence is not for sale in Alberta by banning corporate and union donations, but given the PC Party's heavy reliance on corporate interests, I won't hold my breath.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

North American Occupational Safety and Health Week

Mr. Luan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to rise today to acknowledge the North American Occupational Safety and Health Week, which is from May 5 to May 11. It is an initiative led by the Canadian Society of Safety Engineering and a number of other partnering organizations across the continent. The government of Alberta is very proud to take part in this annual event focused on the importance of preventing injury and illness in the workplace.

Mr. Speaker, despite the sad stories of every workplace incident, the good news is that they are 100 per cent preventable. By participating in this initiative, the government of Alberta takes the opportunity to educate employers, employees, and the public to understand their workplace responsibilities.

During this week over 30 events are planned province-wide. You can find them on the Ministry of Human Services website, but here's one I want to highlight. This is called the work safe Alberta student video contest. This event engages youth to showcase their creativity and talent in raising public awareness of this important issue. Congratulations to the three winning teams. They are Strathcona composite in Edmonton, Bishop Carroll in Calgary, and Stirling school in Stirling village in southern Alberta. They will go on to represent Alberta and compete in the national student video contest. I urge members of this House to cast your vote by visiting youtube.com/YourJobVotreTravail.

Mr. Speaker, the goal of workplace health and safety in this province is very simple, to ensure that every Albertan returns home safely at the end of each workday. Thank you.

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

Results-based Budgeting Economic Development Challenge Panel

Ms Kennedy-Glans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 2012 this government made a commitment to a new process, results-based budgeting, to ensure that all government programs are reviewed for relevance, effectiveness, and efficiency. Many constituents of mine have asked for more detail on this process, and in response I'd like to share my experience chairing one of the inaugural panels.

Last November the results-based budgeting panel on economic development was created by the Treasury Board and Finance ministry. Our RBB panel was tasked with challenging the results of the evaluation of over 50 economic development programs administered by this government with a combined budget of \$675 million. These programs fall within the mandate of eight government ministries, and to be clear, it was not within our panel's mandate to recommend government policy.

To do this work, I was assigned an impressive team of five external experts, whom I introduced in the Legislature a few weeks ago, plus two other members, my colleagues from Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock and Edmonton-Mill Woods. Our challenge panel asked hard-hitting questions like: "This program was set up in response to a critical need in 2005. Hasn't the program achieved its purpose? Is it still relevant? What are the entry and exit strategies for this program?" or "Why are these four programs administered separately? Wouldn't they be more effectively and efficiently managed with a clearer governance structure and under the same management strategy?" or "If ministries shared services for grant administration, what savings could be achieved?"

1:50

At times the challenge had a bit of a *Dragons' Den* feel, but deputy ministers and ADMs from the eight ministries rose to the challenge. Some of these decisions will be put in place immediately. Some of the recommendations will be implemented via the 2014 budget process. In my opinion, all of these changes can't be expected overnight.

Thank you.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: Hon. members, before we start the clock, let us be reminded that we have about 82 people watching from high school who have already assumed your roles once today and are looking forward to observing the highest possible level of role modelling you can offer. Let's not disappoint them.

First main set of questions. The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Report to Taxpayers

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, the Premier never misses an opportunity to remind Albertans they elected her government last year, but she also never misses an opportunity to campaign and have taxpayers foot the bill. We all know about the way she used school kids as a backdrop for her election-style school announcement bashing the Wildrose. Her backbench MLAs use question period to attack us as well. And now the latest, a PC-branded propaganda piece disguised as a government brochure. The election is three years away. How much more of these blatantly partisan political stunts are taxpayers going to have to pay for?

Ms Redford: Well, Mr. Speaker, we are very excited to be able to make sure that we are accountable to Albertans for the decisions that we made in Budget 2013, and we're proud of the fact that we're going to deliver that fact-based document to 1.2 million households this week. I find it ironic that this party, which produces these documents that say right on them "Wildrose Official Opposition," would stand up and ask that question when taxpayer money paid for this and it actually refers to the name of a party.

Ms Smith: We spent about a hundred bucks on that. You're spending \$350,000.

The back-in-debt budget that this document brags about, as I said, actually cut \$210,000 from Safe House, a society that rescues victims of sexual exploitation. The \$350,000 that this government wasted on a PC election-style brochure would have covered Safe House for more than a year. How can she justify that?

Mr. Horner: You know, Mr. Speaker, the amount of misinformation that is spread by documents such as this, paid for by the taxpayers, needs to be countered by 29 cents per household of facts to Albertans so that they understand what kind of mistruths are being spread in documents like the other one. We do not apologize for communicating to Albertans the information that Albertans want to know.

Ms Smith: That's \$350,000 in new money, and it doesn't mention the \$17 billion worth of debt once. Maybe the Premier can get some of her corporate cronies to gather up some bulk donations and stop gouging taxpayers for things like this waste of money.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier can't stop campaigning. Last summer she said: if what we are doing doesn't pass the highest level of scrutiny, we shouldn't be doing it. I couldn't agree more, Premier. When is she going to start raising the bar?

Ms Redford: I'll tell you that the people that I'm concerned about judging us are not the opposition but Albertans, Mr. Speaker. In 2013 this government is delivering on the commitments that we made to Albertans by investing in infrastructure, investing in schools, doing better than this party across the way with respect to controlling spending, not increasing taxes. That document sets out the facts clearly for Albertans in a way that we can be accountable for the decisions that we made to ensure that they, not the opposition, can hold us to account.

The Speaker: The Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition. Second main set of questions.

Ms Smith: A 26 per cent approval rating speaks for itself.

Political Party Donations

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, many Albertans were shocked to learn that the door is now open to the creation of U.S.-style political action committees here in Alberta. The recent ruling from the Chief Electoral Officer indicated that the large Katz Group bulk donation was okay under existing rules. Entirely appropriate, says the Premier. But others, including the election financing expert Robert MacDermid of York University, said that he was appalled, and he called the ruling, quote, a licence to give money without disclosing the truth about it. Does the Premier want to reconsider her position?

Mr. Denis: Well, Mr. Speaker, if anyone needs to reconsider her position, I'll give her this number: \$464,500. That's the amount of

bulk donations that her party received from one source – one source – her former leader, from 2004 to 2008. Consider that.

The Speaker: A point of order has been raised by the Member for Airdrie at 1:56 p.m.

Second question, please.

Ms Smith: I think the Justice minister is talking about the Alberta Alliance, another political party. Whoops.

Mr. Speaker, with this new Katz precedent there is even less openness and transparency in election financing. [interjections] Elections Alberta admits that the Katz bulk donations are similar to U.S. political action committees. [interjections] But they're different here because of this. There are actually regulations in the United States governing their operations, but there aren't any regulations governing their operations in Alberta. Doesn't the Premier see that having no regulations whatsoever around bulk donations actually makes it worse?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, we have an elections financing act that ensures transparency with respect to political contributions, and we also have legislation that ensures that there are rules that political parties must follow with respect to their conduct. [interjections] To stand up and say that there are no regulations with respect to political . . .

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

The Speaker: Sorry to interrupt, hon. Premier, but there is quite a discussion going on here between Airdrie and the Minister of Justice. I just wonder if they would like to either step outside and have their conversation . . . [interjections] I'll have the Sergeant-at-Arms accompany you if you'd like.

Hon. Premier, if you'd like to continue.

Political Party Donations (continued)

Ms Redford: Thank you. I'll just continue, Mr. Speaker. To suggest that there is not regulation with respect to political fundraising and transparency or with respect to the way that parties conduct themselves is absolutely false, and the opposition shouldn't suggest it.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, there's another way to close this massive loophole that threatens to damage the fairness that Albertans demand in their elections. The government could simply ban union and corporate donations to election campaigns. Opposition parties support that. It would be a much-needed win for the Premier. Why doesn't she do it?

Mr. Denis: The Leader of the Opposition: \$749,562. That's the amount in corporate donations that her party accepted during the 2012 election. Those who live in glass houses, Mr. Speaker, need not throw stones. [interjections]

The Speaker: All right. All right. All right. Enough already. You're showing off to our students. See, hon. students, what I was talking about now? You see this?

Please continue. Third main set of questions.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Eighty per cent of our donations come from individuals. Ninety per cent of their donations come from corporations.

Care for Dementia Patients

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, just as we hear of dementia facilities reducing staff, a fatality inquiry report released Monday is recommending more care for those with dementia. Eighty-four-year-old dementia patient William Buckley, who lived in the Health minister's constituency, choked on a paper napkin in 2010, apparently thinking it was food. Mr. Buckley was being looked after by a caring staff, a registered nurse, and health care aides supervised mealtimes, but even with all that care Mr. Buckley got into trouble. How can families of dementia patients in other facilities feel secure now that they see that staffing levels are going down?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, this is a very tragic situation. While I have not reviewed the fatality report in detail, I am aware of most of the recommendations. This report dealt with the unfortunate death of a gentleman in a specific facility at a specific point in time under a specific set of circumstances. There are some comments in the report that talk about benefits from making the system simpler to understand for residents' families and families pursuing other options. But there is absolutely no basis to conclude from the report that there is a widespread issue with respect to the care of dementia patients in this province.

2:00

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, Judge Wheatley actually said that the funding for dementia patients is a mess. He wrote that despite the best efforts of an expert who testified, "a comprehension of this funding system was impossible to understand and one wonders how healthcare professionals . . . on the front line can possibly bring understanding and logic to this system." Will the minister accept Judge Wheatley's recommendation to create a comprehensible system so that the public can understand how facilities get funding?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, I will agree with the hon. member to a very limited extent. There is certainly always room to improve in making our system easier to understand for Albertans. Many of us are assisting mothers or fathers or other loved ones to navigate the continuing care system, a very good system I might add, and to find the placement that works best for them. But there is absolutely nothing in this report, which, again, is a report based on a situation in 2010, that would lead me to conclude that we have anything but the best possible approach to funding for continuing care. We use patient-based funding in Alberta in 2013. This system matches financial resources to the specific needs of the resident, and that includes the staffing support that resident receives.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, the government's approach to assessing long-term care patients and having funding follow them is sound in theory, but in practice people with dementia are rated lower than other patients and now get less funding and less care. Judge Wheatley said this. "It is obvious that no sufficient research has been done in this field especially in the area of geriatric or dementia nursing situations." He was told that the Alberta Health Quality Council should be asked to undertake research to determine proper staffing levels. Will the minister commit to act on this recommendation?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, we are continually working to improve continuing care in this province. It seems to me that public policy that is soundly based on matching financial and staffing resources to the needs of specific residents is in the interests of those

residents and the families and the communities that are served by them. The hon. member is attempting to make generalizations based on a report on a specific fatality incident, a very unfortunate incident, in 2010. I suggest she try to understand what the system in 2013 consists of, and perhaps then we can have a discussion.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. A public fatality inquiry describes an elderly man with dementia dying on a weekend because he choked on a napkin, went into respiratory distress, and had a heart attack. Now, if he had choked on a Monday, he might still be alive because there would've been a full contingent of staff to help him. According to the inquiry's expert, staffing levels should not vary on the weekends and should be much greater than when this senior needed help. To the Premier: tell me again why decreasing staffing for frail seniors just to drive down costs is okay for this province?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, this is clearly beyond the pale. Staffing levels across Alberta are not reduced on weekends in continuing care facilities. There are challenges across the country in recruiting sufficient staff for a growing number of citizens who require continuing care. But to suggest somehow on the basis of a report in 2010 about a very unfortunate situation that occurred with respect to a very specific set of circumstances that this is cause for widespread public concern is simply not fair to the residents, their families, or, most importantly, the staff that care for them.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I know staffing is less in this facility because I am there twice a week, and I read the notice by the elevator that talked about staffing changes. My heart skipped a beat this morning when I read that because the facility where this man died is the facility where my mother lives. So please tell me and everyone else in Alberta that has someone, a family member in care: why are seniors paying such an awful price for being frail and for getting old in Alberta?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, with all due respect to the hon. member and her family situation I, too, know very well the facility in which this incident occurred. I can tell you that as a result of the move to patient-based funding across this province staffing levels in many facilities have increased over the last year and a half in order to meet the needs of their particular residents. Equally and more recently staffing levels have been adjusted downward in facilities where the same level of care is not required for the residents in care at that particular point in time. This is a system that we watch closely. We believe it reflects a good intent and policy on the part of Alberta Health Services to allocate staffing resources appropriately.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, given that on March 11 I said that the government was "playing a game of risk and time here" with seniors in long-term care because staff ratios are important, particularly at night or on weekends, when people get sick, throw up, can't turn over, and then choke, how is this honouring our parents, our elders?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, a system that allocates resources based on the specific needs of residents at a specific point in time is a system that is supporting residents and families and communities.

Again, to make generalizations about our continuing care system on the basis of a specific incident that took place three years ago is simply not an accurate reflection of the excellent work that is going into continuing care across the province today. [interjection]

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the New Democrat opposition, followed by Airdrie.

Long-term Care Staffing Ratios

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, as we've already heard, a public fatality report into the death of a dementia patient in long-term care found that staffing levels are insufficient and instructed that the province look into staff-patient ratios. This is not addressed by the money-following-the-patient policy that the government is talking about. Since a damning Auditor General's report in 2007 the NDP has been calling for action on this issue, and for those years the government has ignored this basic aspect of caring for our seniors. My question is to the Premier. Why has the government failed Alberta seniors by refusing to take action on adequate staffing in long-term care?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, no doubt what the hon. member would have us do is to regulate staffing ratios for all residents in Alberta and be completely indifferent to the very large number of people that require care above that level in order to adequately meet their needs. The hon. member has access to this information. He can see clearly the paid hours that are allocated for long-term care supportive living level 4, dementia, which is the subject of this question, and the other levels of care that are provided in these facilities. Again, the hon. member would do well to look at what we're doing today in continuing care, and I'm sure he would realize that it's a patient- and resident-centred approach.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I have, but both the Auditor General and the justice in this inquiry talked about the need for minimum staffing levels, and that's not accomplished by the government policy.

Last weekend Albertans in Cochrane rallied against patient-based funding, which this minister seems to think is the solution, but facilities like the one where this senior died are the ones that have suffered the most from his new formula, that has cost them the most staff. What's he going to do about that?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know, herein lies the basic difference in philosophy between the hon. member and this government. We believe that public health care dollars need to be allocated based on the needs of the residents and patients that we serve in the health care system, and we believe that residents in continuing care facilities deserve no less than that. [interjections] It calls for a higher level of sophistication in this debate than to simply revert to the policies of the 1960s and '70s to only provide one level of care for outpatients and to regulate or legislate the nature of the care that should be provided. These are individual residents. They are supported by families and staff in the local communities that serve them. This was a very unfortunate situation, and we certainly feel for the family, but the facts are the facts. [interjections]

The Speaker: Let's continue without the interjections, please, Edmonton-Calder – thank you – Edmonton-Centre, and Edmonton-Strathcona over the last few minutes. Let's carry on.

Leader of the New Democrat opposition, your third question.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, it's unfortunate that the Premier doesn't care enough to get up and answer these questions.

This government can't be trusted to protect our seniors. This government can't be trusted to provide our seniors with the kind of care they deserve. This government can't be trusted to build long-term care beds for our seniors. To the Premier: will this government start rebuilding trust with Alberta seniors and commit to finally legislating staff ratios in long-term care facilities?

The Speaker: A point of order has been noted by the Government House Leader at 2:10.

The hon. minister.

2:10

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, there is no greater defender of seniors in this province than the Premier of this province. Until recently no one has shown a greater interest than the Premier of this province in actually matching the resources that we have available to serve a growing number of seniors, some of whom have very, very high care needs.

We will continue in our commitment to open 1,000 new continuing care spaces per year across the province. We're on track to reach our goal of 5,300 over five years. All of those beds can accommodate all levels of care, including those with dementia.

Securities Regulation

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, an important aspect of securities legislation is to protect investors against fraud. In Alberta's exempt market, however, enforcement of these rules is almost nonexistent. Over the last few years over 25,000 Albertans have lost over \$2.2 billion to companies like Platinum Equities, Foundation Capital, and many others in a manner that has all the telltale signs of a real estate scam. To the Minister of Finance: are you aware of this situation, and what are you doing to help the thousands of Albertans who appear to have been ripped off?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, it's a good question. It caught me off guard a little bit. We are aware and the Alberta Securities Commission is aware of a number of these exempt filings that have been made over the last few years. We are not alone in this. A number of provinces across Canada are also becoming involved in this. The Alberta Securities Commission is doing investigations where they have purview over the offerings. We are also as ministers across the passport system looking at that exempt status, and we are bringing forward some new regulation opportunities across the country in this area.

Mr. Anderson: Given that literally hundreds of Albertans have reported these alleged frauds to the RCMP, yet the issue is still not under investigation by them, will the minister join with me in writing to the RCMP to inform them of this situation and ask that it be investigated as soon as possible so hopefully the Crown can recover any funds fraudulently obtained and return that money to the rightful owners?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, indeed – and we probably would need to tread a little bit carefully here – there are some matters before the courts as we speak. There are some investigations that the RCMP are undertaking as we speak. For some of these activities one would have to go to court to determine whether or not they

were fraudulent, in fact. There are some issues around what people got into and what they were told. We have to get all the facts before we can actually accuse someone of something.

Mr. Anderson: Well, it certainly isn't illegal to report a crime, and that's what we need to do in this case.

Given that the Alberta Securities Commission has not adequately protected Alberta investors from these dozens of alleged scams, will the minister commit to investigate what can be done to strengthen the ASC so that it can aggressively enforce securities legislation, institute much stiffer fines and punishments, reimburse victims of these crimes when appropriate, and, most importantly, protect Albertans from investment fraudsters and scam artists moving forward?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member basically just outlined what the ASC is doing right now. There are certain fines that are being levied. There are certain activities that are currently before the court, and if they are found to be contravening the act or contravening the law, the fines will be levied. As well, the police are investigating. I know of a couple that they are investigating as we speak, and they will follow the process of that investigation. The other thing to remember is that the ASC does levy fines in the province of Alberta and, in fact, has levied substantial fines this year alone. However, if the proponents don't have any money, you can't get blood from a stone.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock, followed by Calgary-Shaw.

High School Education Initiatives

Ms Kubinec: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the spirit of Education Week earlier today the Premier and the Education minister held a press conference with Alberta students from across the province about education in Alberta and specifically how this government is improving diploma exams. I'm wondering how the initiative that he has been announcing over the last few days is going to make a difference for kids. To the Minister of Education: by moving to a digital format for diploma exams, are we actually improving the exam for the written aspect of the exam, and are we eliminating the need for teachers from the picture?

Mr. J. Johnson: Absolutely not, Mr. Speaker. What I can tell you is about the great announcements we've had over the last couple of days, including the dual crediting, the new ministerial order on learner outcomes. Today was diploma exams and moving them to a digital format, which is really going to be about centring the system on the student, which is what we heard so much about through Inspiring Education. Students learn at different paces. We need to embrace that, we need to enable that, and they need the flexibility. That's why we're making these exams in a digital format. We're going to give them more opportunities at different times of the year to write. We're going to make it easier for teachers that have to mark those. We'll start introducing the diploma exams in 2014 and move to our diploma exams in digital format in 2017 and, ultimately, to exams on demand.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Kubinec: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: given that we're obviously committed to building schools and expanding programs but that some school boards like my own are getting less funding this year, are we making these

advancements at the expense of day-to-day learning, or is this just window dressing?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, these are very substantial transformations in the education system, and they are within our educational budget. We've allocated dollars towards those. I want to highlight that the educational budget actually went up this year by \$216 million. Some of that is capital, of course, but over \$40 million in operating. So this is a great investment, \$35 million, for education every day. We're continuing to fund enrolment increases and core programs and initiatives that are important to our students, but this is really going to centre the system around our students, and these are great developments.

Ms Kubinec: Again to the same minister. Given this announcement today and the funding announced for the dual credit program yesterday, much of the focus is on our high school students. Can the minister tell us when we can expect some announcements that will help our younger students as well?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, that's a good question. We're going to continue to focus our efforts on all of our students. Although the announcement today is really around diploma exams and yesterday there was a fantastic announcement on dual credit, last week was a great week to be the Minister of Education, when we rolled out 30 infrastructure projects. Most of those were for elementary and middle schools. If Albertans stay tuned over the next day or two, we're going to have more announcements that will impact kids, especially in grades 3, 6, and 9.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw, followed by Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

PDD Supports Intensity Scale

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 2008 PDD boards started a pilot project known as the supports intensity scale, or SIS, a tool intended to evaluate the support requirements of a person with developmental disabilities. The SIS places a value from 1 to 7 on a variety of criteria to determine the support an individual should need. My question for the minister is very simple. True or false: when the PDD boards introduced this to service providers, caregivers, self-advocates, families, and clients, were they assured that the supports intensity scale would not be used to determine funding?

Mr. Oberle: You know, Mr. Speaker, I can't speak to the conversations that were held back then. What I can tell the hon. member is that that's not the sole determinant of funding today.

Mr. Wilson: Given that many organizations and families, including my own parents, would dispute your claim, Minister, when did your ministry advise service providers, caregivers, self-advocates, and families that SIS would become the tool for determining funding?

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, the supports intensity scale, pretty much as described, is a tool to determine supports intensity, need. It's based on an assessment of need and an understanding of what the person's circumstances are and natural supports, those kinds of things. That's what determines funding.

Mr. Wilson: Well, given that roughly only two-thirds of PDD clients have had a personal SIS interview to date, will you ensure,

Minister, that every PDD client has an individual SIS completed before implementing your changes, that are merely seven weeks away?

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, actually, over 80 per cent of the PDD clients in Alberta have had an assessment already. We will be through most of them before July 1 and the rest of them very shortly thereafter.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, followed by Calgary-Mountain View.

Physician Recruitment in Tofield

Ms Fenske: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Unlike some others here today who have complained about communicating with the public, I know that listening and imparting information is vital in public service. In Tofield we knew for months that there would be a doctor shortage. Limited emergency services have now been implemented, and two additional doctors have expressed interest in practising in the town. To the Minister of Health: when are full emergency services expected to be reinstated, and when are the doctors expected to begin practising?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'll speak first to the recruitment process for physicians. We have multiple teams from AHS and the Department of Health working together on physician recruitment in Tofield. There is a local recruitment and retention committee that engaged the assistance of a recruitment firm, Global Medics, to work with them and AHS physicians and recruiters to help bring additional doctors into the community. This is a challenge that's faced by a number of smaller communities across the province. It is not uncommon. But through the rural physician action plan and other initiatives and particularly the work of local communities we're confident we'll be able to address this in the short term.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Fenske: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. A community open house on health care in Tofield was requested several weeks ago. Why was one not held prior to the reduction in emergency hours?

2:20

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, obviously, the reduction in emergency department hours is going to be a response to a shortage of physicians in the community. I do understand that AHS is planning to meet with the community and stakeholders in the near future. Again, they've committed to keeping the town informed of the progress being made in recruitment. But as we look across the province at our success in physician recruitment in local communities, we know that local communities are a huge part of that solution.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Fenske: Thank you. To the same minister. You have indicated that AHS will be communicating with the residents of Tofield. Do you have any more idea as to a firm date?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't have that information with me. There are meetings going on around several communities in the province related to physician recruitment. My advice to the hon. member is to continue to do what she has been doing and to work with the local recruitment committee and Alberta Health

Services in the hope of recruiting additional physicians in the short term and, of course, getting the emergency department back up to full operational status.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by Edmonton-Strathcona.

Coal-fired Power Production

Dr. Swann: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Today is World Asthma Day, raising awareness of a life-threatening condition affecting Albertans of all ages, probably some of the students in our galleries today. An important contributor to asthma in Alberta is airborne pollutants from coal-fired power plants. Despite health costs associated with coal in Alberta at close to \$300 million annually, this Conservative government, with their federal cousins, has caved to the industry lobby to extend the normal lifespan of these antiquated polluters by five to 10 years. To the Energy Minister: why are you continuing to extend the damage to the environment and to the health of all Albertans by extending the life of these coal-fired power plants?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to say that we work very hard with the federal government to make sure that we have a baseload of coal in this province to ensure that Albertans are receiving a very good price for their electricity while ensuring that we're taking care of the air and the water in this province. With regard to those plants we've worked with the industry. We're working on it sector by sector, and coal plants will be phased out over 50 years. We are working and taking a very proactive approach to the reductions in coal emissions.

Dr. Swann: Typical of this government, Mr. Speaker: profits before people. Could it have anything to do with the \$400,000 you received from the industry in your 2011 election? Albertans are rightly . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, is that the question?

Dr. Swann: No.

The Speaker: Sorry, hon. member. I thought I heard a question. Conclude your question, please.

Dr. Swann: Albertans are rightfully shocked that two-thirds of our electricity is still generated from coal in this province. What is your excuse for putting Albertans' health risks second to profits in this province?

Mrs. McQueen: Well, Mr. Speaker, Albertans also want us to make sure that we put them first, too, and we put them first by making sure that we have electricity in this province that is affordable for Albertans. When you have an 800-year supply of low-cost, coal-based electricity, we work with Albertans to make sure that they have that. We're not putting industry first. We put Albertans and the environment first in this province.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, coal is an important health care cost, and it damages our environmental reputation. What is your excuse, again, Mr. Minister, for not using the abundance of natural gas which could be powering our power today? We have alternatives. We have clean alternatives. What is your excuse?

Mr. Hughes: If you actually look at the facts, what you would see, Mr. Speaker, is that over the last 10 years the percentage of electricity generated in this province by coal has gone from some 60 to 70 per cent down to about 40 per cent today. We're clearly on a trajectory of reducing the amount of coal that's used in this province. In addition, natural gas is increasing in the amount that is being used, just as is the case throughout North America, and that's a good thing. It's using natural gas, it's producing a cleaner greenhouse gas footprint, and it's ensuring that Albertans have a healthier environment as well.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by Chestermere-Rocky View.

Pipeline Safety

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last summer, after three major pipeline leaks in Alberta and following damning reviews by two separate Auditors General, the NDP called for an independent review of pipeline safety by Alberta's Auditor General. Instead, the government did a quick bait and switch, and with the approval of their friends in the energy industry they came up with their own hand-picked group to do a review. Since December that report has been sitting on the minister's desk. Why has it not been released yet?

Mr. Hughes: Well, Mr. Speaker, this government is deeply committed to ensuring that we have a very high-performing pipeline industry in this province because that is so important to our credibility in the rest of the world as well. Let's deal with the facts and not the grassy knoll conspiracy theories of certain members of this House. The fact is that the report arrived in the last month after review by the Energy Resources Conservation Board, and it will be released in due course.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that providing editing privileges to the subject of a performance review is just one more example of this government's commitment to having the fox guard the henhouse and given that the real accountability for pipeline safety performance in Alberta is to Alberta's citizens through this Assembly, why is the minister afraid of releasing his insider review of pipeline safety while the House is still in session?

Mr. Hughes: Mr. Speaker, I'm quite confident that hon. members opposite will be able to generate public debate whether this House is in session or not. I will bring this forward in the fullness of time. What is important is to ensure that we have the highest performing pipeline system in the world, in fact, because we have 400,000 kilometres of pipeline in this province. We ought to know what we're doing, and we do know what we're doing.

Ms Notley: How about you tell Albertans what you're doing?

Given that, as you say, there are over 400,000 kilometres of pipeline running through Alberta yet just yesterday Enbridge admitted to breaking safety rules for over 10 years without being called to account by federal regulators, why won't this government face this issue honestly, admit there is good reason for Albertans to be concerned, and come clean by releasing that report today?

Mr. Hughes: Mr. Speaker, the pipeline industry is an important infrastructure in this province and has been working hard. Actually, it was this government and it was me as the Minister of Energy who sat down with industry leaders and specifically said

to them: folks, you need to make sure that the whole industry performs as well as the best in industry can, and you need to get to work on doing that. It was a strong message of encouraging industry, and then we started the recovery.

That report will be made available when it's ready, in due course.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View, followed by Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

New School Construction

Mr. McAllister: Mr. Speaker, thank you. Why don't we start with a positive? We all welcomed the good news of the school announcements in this province last week. Now, to that, there are a lot of school boards and communities, I think we're aware, that didn't get any news. The Wildrose's 10-year debt-free capital plan would do that by delivering 100 schools and renovating 60 more and, more importantly, by publishing a priority list so that communities don't have to wait with bated breath to find out if they're going to get a school. Will the government, then, finally adopt the Wildrose policy, release its priority list for new schools, and take the politics out of the classroom?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, what I can tell you is that we won't adopt the Wildrose policy of reducing our capital build of schools by 30 per cent. [interjections] As they mentioned when they launched their capital brochure, they said that 30 per cent of the schools we're building today aren't needed. I wonder which ones those are? I'd like to see that list. [interjections] Are those the schools in Airdrie? Is that the school we just announced in Okotoks? Is that the school we just opened in Langdon?

The Speaker: A good little exchange there. Thank you.

First supplementary, please.

Mr. McAllister: You know, Mr. Speaker, I did start with a wonderful positive.

The Speaker: Noted.

Mr. McAllister: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister. Given that students in the STAR Catholic division were among the many communities who will not be receiving new schools and given that their board chair is saying that they've "been left out of the loop" for which criteria are at play when it comes to project approval, can the government explain why they insist on keeping school boards across this province like the one in Leduc in the dark and get to publishing a list so we all know what's going on?

2:30

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, you know, it's a very good question. There are a lot of school boards and parents and teachers and kids out there that want to know: "Is our school going to get funded? How do you guys decide on these lists?" The reality is that we've got over 2,000 schools in the province. There are also a number of modernization projects on the go. Besides that, there are modulars. If you wanted to keep an inventory list of all those projects and which one is coming up next, you'd need an entire bureaucracy just to keep that up on a day-to-day basis. Nevertheless, our guys do the best they can. School boards change their capital plans every year and even during the year, so it is just an impossible thing to keep a list of 3,000 projects. How big do they want this list to be?

Mr. McAllister: Mr. Speaker, when adjustments are needed to be made on a list, I don't think anybody would begrudge a school board for making them.

Another positive. You know, I think we all recognize that we can't build all the schools we need, but given that, we should be doing all we can to allow boards and communities to prepare for the future. Will the minister commit to contacting the boards who did not have their projects approved and giving them some feedback so they know where they are as a provincial priority and can in turn plan for the kids and the families in their community?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, we do that on a day-to-day basis. I talk to school boards every day. I talk to board chairs, superintendents, the business officials. As a matter of fact, we just met with all the stakeholders yesterday, when we launched the dual crediting and the new ministerial order.

Mr. Speaker, this is ironic, that we've got a group that's advocating for us to build more schools when they said that a good 30 per cent of the schools we're building don't need to be built. In addition, their alternative budget last year wanted us to cut our infrastructure budget by \$1.623 billion. That's a very specific number with no list. The year previous it was \$2.74 billion. That's a very specific number with no list. I think they should look at themselves in the mirror.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Airdrie, your point of order at 2:32 has been noted.

Let us move on to Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill, followed by Strathmore-Brooks.

Noninstructional Postsecondary Tuition Fees

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Postsecondary institutions in Alberta are struggling to cope with the 2013 budget cuts, and some of them are offering retirement packages to faculty, including some of our leading researchers. In the past some institutions have responded to funding cuts by unilaterally imposing noninstructional fees on students for a variety of services. My questions are for the Minister of Enterprise and Advanced Education. Why has the government not allowed postsecondary institutions to raise their tuition fees by the increased cost of living?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, offering early retirement packages to tenured professors, who have no mandatory retirement age and actually can sit in office till they die, is not perhaps a bad idea if they choose to take those retirement packages, but we were very, very clear in our messaging. We will not be balancing the budgets of this province or our provincial universities, schools, and colleges on the backs of students. We have to make sure that we have efficiencies in the system, that we run those institutions as efficiently as possible before we ask students to pay additional money through tuition or taxpayers to invest additional dollars into the institutes.

Dr. Brown: Research funding coming into the province of Alberta for universities is a major economic driver, so why isn't the department doing more to retain and to attract leading researchers to our universities?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, we are attracting researchers to this province, but I would agree with this member, if that's what he's suggesting, that we can probably do more. The way to attract researchers is not only through promoting the province of Alberta but actually creating an environment in which they can engage in

research that excites them, in research that is relevant, in research that can be commercialized, in research that solves real-world problems with real, scientific solutions. That is what we're going to do. We know we have great facilities, we know we have great academia, and we're hoping to foster an environment that will attract researchers from all over the world to have that happen.

Dr. Brown: Will the minister explain what his government's policy is regarding noninstructional fees and the increases imposed upon students for those fees?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, I have been very clear with chairs and presidents of all institutions, urging them not to increase the fees unless they are increasing the level of service that will be available to students. The possibility of regulating those fees may be discussed. The fact is that those fees vary from year to year based on what services are offered to students. Most of those services are very valuable, and students want them. They're extracurricular. We will be discussing that as we will be looking at different models of funding postsecondary institutions and as we will be opening up the legislation soon.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks, followed by Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley.

Alberta Energy Regulator

Mr. Hale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In December the ERCB released a draft of a new regulatory framework for unconventional oil and gas. This proposed new framework completely changes how regulations will happen. It will regulate plays instead of individual wells, and it will deal with performance outcomes rather than setting specific procedures. To do this, stakeholders, industry, and the regulator will have to work together to write an entirely new joint-outcomes document. To the Minister of Energy: doesn't experimenting with an entirely new style of regulatory regime defeat the stated purpose of improving efficiency for the new regulator?

Mr. Hughes: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has raised an important question, and it deals, really, with: how do you ensure that you continue to have leading-edge regulatory capacity in the regulation of oil and gas business while technology is evolving dramatically? This will all fall under the responsibility of the Alberta energy regulator. We will have a new process in which the policy management office in the Department of Energy will be able to play a role in defining policy, consulting with interested parties, including the hon. member or people he knows.

Mr. Hale: Mr. Speaker, given that in the next month the new regulator will have to get up and running, integrate new environmental regulations, and now experiment with an entirely new type of regulatory regime for unconventional oil and gas, isn't the minister concerned that he may have put too much on the new regulator's plate and set it up for failure?

Mr. Hughes: Actually, we have 75 years of exceptional experience in this province of a regulator, going right back to the Turner Valley conservation board in 1938. I know, Mr. Speaker, you probably don't remember that either. But we have a long and an honourable history in this province, and we have many changes that are imposed not by the minister but by the circumstances, by industry, by evolving technologies, and by science as well that ensure that we actually have the appropriate level of regulatory oversight in this province.

Mr. Hale: Mr. Speaker, given that the greatest challenge for the energy industry is market access and given that the world is demanding ever-greater assurances on pipeline review and given that the Energy minister answered a question earlier saying that he would release the report by March 31, why aren't the ERCB's resources being used to develop and promote top-notch pipeline integrity regulations rather than experimenting with an entirely new style of regulatory framework for unconventional oil and gas?

Mr. Hughes: Well, Mr. Speaker, it would be nice if we could live in a world where there's stuff that we could ignore and other stuff that we could focus on, but in fact we have the responsibility of dealing with all aspects of the energy industry, and that is all-important to how we carry on business in this province. We ensure that we get the right balance between economic development, environmental concerns, and respecting landowners in the process with the new Alberta energy regulator. This is a very important initiative, and it's going to be led by first-class people who are really dedicated to ensuring that we meet that balance and that we serve the interests of all Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley, followed by Little Bow.

Rat Control

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since the early 1950s Alberta has boasted about being rat free because of a very aggressive rat control program that has kept this pest outside of Alberta's borders. Last year, however, in Medicine Hat all that changed. Agricultural producers in my constituency of Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley, located in the northwest part of the province, are very concerned about this rodent. Recently some municipalities questioned the need to spend resources on this pest. My questions are to the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. As we've heard little of this, what is the status of the control or eradication program?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I appreciate the question from the hon. member. Things have been somewhat quiet on the rat scene in recent months, but that's a good thing. It is true that last summer we did have an infestation at the landfill in Medicine Hat, and that gave us an opportunity to see our people at work. We have wonderful resources, who take their job very seriously in keeping rats out of the province. Now, we call Alberta rat free, and we are, but that doesn't mean that there are never rats that show up here. But when they do, they don't last long.

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that normally rats can carry viruses and disease and cause millions of dollars of losses to food crops, what is your ministry doing to ensure that municipalities have proper control plans?

Mr. Olson: Mr. Speaker, again, I appreciate the question, and particularly I appreciate it coming from an MLA in northwestern Alberta because people tend to think that the focus of this issue is in the south and along the Saskatchewan border. That is true; we do have a special focus there. However, we think that in every part of the province we should be ready to deal with an infestation because a rat could arrive on a truck, in a piece of equipment, on a train. Two rats can be responsible for reproduction and create

15,000 rats in a year. This is something we take very seriously because they could do a great deal of damage to crops and to property.

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: what is being done to eliminate the source of Norway rats, preventing this, as you said, from reoccurring and preventing their spread to other parts of the province, including my constituency, especially as we move seed and grain by trucks and by rail and by farm equipment? There's a lot of farm equipment coming in from auctions from the Saskatchewan side.

Mr. Olson: Mr. Speaker, we obviously rely on people to report when they see a rat so that our people can get in place and deal with them. Where we suspect a rat infestation, bait is placed. People can phone 310.FARM – that's 3276 – and report a rat sighting, and our people will deal with it immediately. We were able to maintain all of the support in terms of our budget for these programs. We work very closely with municipalities, and where necessary we have even provided extra resources for them to deal with the problem.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that concludes question period for today.

In 30 seconds from now we will resume with private members' statements, starting with Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Members' Statements

(continued)

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

Asian Heritage Month

Mr. Quadri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to pay tribute to Albertans of Asian descent whose contributions have helped build our province and make it such an amazing place to live. Throughout May many organizations and communities across Canada will be celebrating Asian Heritage Month.

We as Albertans and as Canadians take great pride in our diversity. The history of our multiculturalism is the struggle and success story of the pan-Asian communities. From the earliest days of settlement to the present day the contributions of Asian Albertans have made enormous impacts across all facets of life. Asian Canadians helped build our great country, working on the railways that linked Canada from coast to coast. Most began in the most humble circumstances, overcoming mighty obstacles to achieve recognition and citizenship.

Today we can find Asian Canadians in all areas of society: artists and athletes, who dazzle with their creativity and dedication, enriching our culture; the scientists and the businesspeople, leading the way to innovation and prosperity; and the public servants, dedicated to service and building better communities. Their contributions have greatly enriched our Alberta. Some, like our previous Lieutenant Governor, the Hon. Norman Kwong, and the recent Juno award winner Vivian Fung, exemplify the spirit of Alberta as a province where ethnicity is no barrier to excellence at the highest levels.

Sometimes the smallest thing is felt every day. For example, you can find a Chinese restaurant, I think, in every part of the community. The Royal Alberta Museum currently has an exhibit called Chop Suey on the Prairies. It is something so ordinary yet an undeniable part of our cultural history, showcasing once again that this is a land truly stitched together by many brilliant threads.

Though many of us were born here, many came from distant lands to make Alberta home. Culture connects us to others in our communities, but culture also connects us to our shared identity as Albertans and as Canadians.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Huntington's Disease Awareness Month

Mrs. Towle: May is Huntington's Disease Awareness Month. Huntington's is a genetic brain disorder. About 1 in 7,000 Canadians has HD, but 1 in every 1,000 is touched by Huntington's as a caregiver, family member, friend, or someone who is at risk. Each child of a parent with HD has a 50 per cent chance of inheriting the disease and is said to be at risk. Males and females have exactly the same risk.

I am one of those 1 in 1,000 touched by Huntington's. My brother Ron had Huntington's. He was 35 when he died. It's a horrible disease. Ron described it this way. It's like having Alzheimer's disease, schizophrenia, and ALS all at once.

Ron's experience began with personality changes, slurred speech, inability to keep his job, and depression. He stopped taking care of himself, had a general lack of co-ordination, an unsteady gait, and a decline in mental abilities. As his disease progressed, his abnormal movements became faster, almost violent. He had jerky, almost dancelike motions. His neurologist called it chorea.

Sadly, like so many Huntington's patients, he had severe dementia associated with the late stages of the disease. Eventually Huntington's patients are unable to look after themselves and need help with daily activities and functions such as eating, hygiene, and toileting. Eventually they become bedridden. The disease leads to complete incapacitation and eventually death. There is no cure.

Ron lived in a long-term care facility for two years. His constant body movements were the equivalent of running a triathlon every 30 minutes. He needed 11,000 calories a day to live. Ron could not feed himself, dress himself, or care for himself. He was vulnerable, but Ron was full of love. Each and every day that our family visited Ron, he hugged us, he kissed us, and he touched us with his struggle. Ron was 32 when he was diagnosed with Huntington's and 35 when he died. We love him. We miss him dearly. He is the reason that I am an MLA.

I encourage all members to go to www.huntingtonsociety.ca and help to find a cure for Huntington's.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Before I introduce a bill, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

The Speaker: Hon. members, unanimous consent is requested to revert briefly to Introduction of Guests. Is anyone opposed to that?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

The Speaker: Proceed, please.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I might beg your indulgence again after Introduction of Bills, a little later on in the Routine, as other guests have not arrived, but I wanted to take this opportunity to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly someone who has been an inspiration for me over

the last 35, 40 years. As I introduce today the Children First Act, I want to recognize an individual who has been teaching for 34 years in the Edmonton public schools system, who has put children first every day, who has brought home issues with respect to children and understanding with respect to what children need to be successful. I might say that she's also successfully been the mother of our three children. My wife, Janet, who has not been introduced in this House in the 15 years that I've been here, is here with us today for the introduction of my bill along with my daughter Janine. I'd ask them to rise and know that I love them very much and that they truly are very special parts of my life and my inspiration and mentors and role models for me.

2:50

The Speaker: Are there any other introductions while we're at that stage?

Mr. Hancock: Yes, as a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker. I'm also very pleased to introduce a number of people who have arrived today to be here for the introduction of Bill 25, people who have been very instrumental as we've consulted and discussed what we could do better to ensure that children have a good start.

I want to single out one person first of all and then introduce the others as a group. The person I want to single out is Marie Whelan. Marie Whelan – I'd ask Marie to stand – is a principal with the Edmonton Catholic school system, and together with Margo McGee, the M and Ms as they're often called, they were the principals of St. Mary school in my constituency and then moved to Monsignor Fee Otterson school, which was in my constituency and now is in the constituency of Edmonton-South West. On the day that I was sworn in as Minister of Education, they provided me with a pin, Children First. Marie and Margo as role models and mentors have been an inspiration to me over the years. There are schools where, if you walk in, you understand what caring for children means, what educating children means. I just want to ask Marie to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

If I may, I'll introduce the others who have joined us today, and I'd ask them to stand as I call their names: Chief Rick Hanson, chief of police from Calgary; Dr. Anny Sauvageau, the Alberta chief medical examiner; Dr. Talbot, the chief medical officer of health; Rhonda Barraclough, Alberta Association of Services for Children and Families; Randy Baker and Jackie Stewart, Child and Youth Advocate office; Robyn Blackadar, president and CEO of the Alberta Centre for Child, Family and Community Research; Fay Orr, the Mental Health Patient Advocate; Sheldon Kennedy of Respect Group Inc.; Bonnie Johnston, CEO of the Sheldon Kennedy Child Advocacy Centre; Joan Carr, superintendent of Edmonton Catholic schools; Kevin McNichol from HomeFront; Bernie Kollman, northern vice-chair of Alberta's Promise; Dr. Allen Benson, Native Counselling Services of Alberta; Val Campbell, the chair of the death review committee working group and a Crown prosecutor in the province of Alberta; Janine Fraser, Alberta Council of Women's Shelters; Christie Lavan, Alberta Council of Women's Shelters; and accompanied by Jason Chance, who works in the deputy minister's office in the department.

All of these individuals have been critical and key in consultations leading up to the Children First Act and, beyond that, to what we're doing on behalf of children, working together collaboratively with the community to ensure that we get the best results. I'd ask them all to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House. I'd like to add a specific thanks to Jason Chance, who has been shepherding this bill through its stages till it got to the House today.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: Let us proceed with the Minister of Human Services for his introduction.

Bill 25 Children First Act

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour and a privilege today to rise and introduce for first reading Bill 25, the Children First Act. It being a money bill, there is a message from His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor recommending the same.

Mr. Speaker, the Children First Act is an important piece of legislation to put a focus on the importance of ensuring that each and every child in Alberta has the opportunity for success. We know from the research, we know from practice that when children get a good start, when they have a stable home life, when they have people who love them, when they have an adult in their life that's a role model and a mentor, they grow up to be successful.

I want to start, again, by acknowledging our Premier for the emphasis that she placed on early childhood development, early learning, the protection of children, and the opportunity for each and every child in Alberta to have the opportunity for success, the opportunity to reach their potential, and the opportunity to aspire to be the best they can be.

I would also like to as well again mention Marie Whelan and Margo McGee, the inspirations for me in terms of the concept of children first and the meaning that that has. In each and every meeting I have, when someone says, "What's that pin about?" I say: "It's not a program; it's an agenda. It's what we're here about."

The elements of the bill will be to provide a children's charter, to provide for a review of policies, programs, and services across government that impact children, to ensure that there is appropriate information sharing between collaborative agencies, the police, education, health, child welfare, others in the community who are working together on behalf of children and that they share the information that they have in the best interests of the child.

It will provide for the sharing of information also, on an anonymized basis, with the Alberta Centre for Child, Family & Community Research. It's very important that this agency, which was set up by government to do research, have access to the wealth of data which we have in the government data banks so that they can actually tell us what is effective, what will be effective, and what the longitudinal analysis will be.

The important parts of the bill are the children's charter, the information sharing, the review of policies and processes that are provisioned in the bill, which will require that we review all legislation, policy, and programs relative to children and report back to the Legislature on them and that we share the data and information with the Alberta Centre for Child, Family & Community Research so they can give us information back upon which we can make decisions.

There are a number of amendments to other acts, which are coming from the consultations which we've had to date with members here and others who have told us some of the early things that we can do at the start towards looking at all of our legislation to make sure that we are operating in the most effective and the most efficient way possible, with the outcome, Mr.

Speaker, of ensuring that every child has access to the opportunities which are in Alberta.

[Motion carried; Bill 25 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, I believe you have three tablings according to my list.

Mr. Eggen: Yes, I do. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Three tablings very quickly. The first one is the appropriate number of copies of a domestic violence letter, an open letter to the Premier from the Calgary Domestic Violence Committee outlining how the elimination of programs like STEP and the community spirit donation grant program have had devastating effects on the ability of nonprofit groups and government agencies to reduce domestic violence in Canada.

The second tabling I have, Mr. Speaker, is the appropriate number of copies of a petition which calls on the government to increase postsecondary funding rather than imposing the devastating cuts to colleges and universities. I have 465 signatures here today and plenty more to come.

The third tabling I have, Mr. Speaker, is the appropriate number of copies of a *Globe and Mail* article from May 7, which is today. The article describes how Adrian Dix has a moderate and level-headed approach to the development in the oil and gas industry and is soon to become the Premier.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by Calgary-Mountain View.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is a copy of the public fatality inquiry that I referenced during my questions today. It was held on the 23rd and 24th of July 2012 and on the 15th of March 2013 respecting a death in the Good Samaritan Society Southgate Care Centre.

The second tabling is an electronic Internet petition. At the last count, which was about an hour and a half ago – they were going up fairly rapidly – there were 2,370 signers. These are parents and students from six or eight different schools – D.S. MacKenzie, Victoria, Hardisty, Esther Starkman, Avalon, Meyokumin, Dunluce, and Coronation – that are involved in an enhanced arts program that happens after school. Because of the funding that transfers from this government to the Edmonton public school board, that program is under threat of being cut even though parents pay for it, so it's of great concern to a number of people.

3:00

The Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but it is 3 o'clock, and the Deputy Government House Leader has caught my attention.

Mr. Denis: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to rise and ask for unanimous consent of the House to continue past 3 o'clock notwithstanding rule 7(7).

The Speaker: Hon. members, unanimous consent is required for us to proceed with the conclusion of our Routine. I'll ask one question. Is anyone opposed to granting that permission? Say so now.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, did you conclude?

Ms Blakeman: Yes. Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Two tablings. One is from Joan Raugust of Calgary, with a 27-year-old with developmental disabilities who describes the Ministry of Human Services as “laying the tracks” in these cuts “as they are driving the train,” with no clear plan since the groundwork has not been laid. She is very concerned about these changes.

The second is from a number of individuals across the province, seniors and pharmacists concerned about the cuts to pharmacy and their programs.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

I have the Minister of Justice, followed by the Leader of Her Majesty’s Loyal Opposition, followed by Calgary-Buffalo. If there are others, please let me know.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just rise to table five copies of five different documents, the first being the 2004 political party annual financial statements for the Alberta Alliance Party indicating that a former leader’s family and corporation contributed \$97,500, 73 per cent; the 2005 report, \$95,000, 72 per cent; the 2005 campaign, \$2,000, at 4 per cent; and 2007, \$150,000, 99.7 per cent during that campaign. After the party merged with the Wildrose Alliance Party, the contributions continued for \$120,000, or 23.3 per cent, of total donations during that campaign. I’ll pass these documents through to the Clerk.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Leader of Her Majesty’s Loyal Opposition.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I made reference to two documents today in my questions. One is the new \$300,000 mailer going out with PC Party colours, five copies, the requisite number.

In addition, the report to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General, public fatality inquiry. This is the sad story of Mr. Buckley and the recommendations from Judge James Wheatley on what needs to be done to ensure that we have better care for those in dementia facilities.

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

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a letter from a constituent of mine, Rachel McDougall-Sutherland, going through the difficulty she has with both finding and keeping daycare, the very little that the federal tax incentive program for daycare does for her as an individual, and requesting that we either get onboard with providing an Alberta daycare program or persuading the federal government to put a national daycare program into effect.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others?

If not, allow me, please, to table five copies of a report produced by the Chief Electoral Officer re candidates who failed to eliminate a campaign deficit reported for the 2012 provincial general election.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Griffiths, Minister of Municipal Affairs, pursuant to the Special Areas Act special areas trust account financial statements, December 31, 2012; pursuant to the Government Organization Act the Alberta Boilers Safety Association annual report, 2012, dated October 31, 2012; and pursuant to the Capital Region Board regulation the Capital Region Board 2012 annual report.

The Speaker: Thank you, Clerk.

We have I think three points of order. The first one, I believe, was from the hon. Member for Airdrie at 1:56 p.m. Do you wish to proceed with your point, your citation, and so on?

Point of Order Factual Accuracy

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I refer to Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j). This is going to a comment that the Justice minister stated, that our party, the Wildrose Party, had in fact in the past accepted bundled donations or something to that effect into the Wildrose Party. This minister was flat out being untruthful. If you’re going to say something, if you’re going to refer to specific numbers in this House and you’re going to specifically make an accusation of that magnitude, you cannot just flat out tell an untruth. This is not a different version of the facts here. This is not that the facts could be interpreted in two different ways. This is just a flat-out falsehood by the Justice minister, and it should not be allowed to proceed.

First of all, the party that he is referencing, the Alberta Alliance Party, is an entirely separate legal entity than the Wildrose Party, a totally separate entity, totally different. I know that’s difficult, but as a lawyer you would think he would have some clue in that noggin of his that you cannot have a completely separate entity be responsible for the actions of a previous entity.

Now, I know that we took the Alliance name, I guess, in 2008 and it became part of this party, but the entities were completely different. It’s kind of like the Progressive Conservatives and the Conservatives federally are completely different, totally different parties. So try to get that through the old noggin there.

That was the first problem. It was a completely different party; obviously, different leaders, but that’s really immaterial. Different parties is the key issue there.

Secondly, you know, it is ironic here. In the case that he spoke of, Mr. Thorsteinson lent that Alliance Party \$130,000. That loan, that bridge financing, very similar to what this party received from Mr. Katz and the Katz group of companies, was found illegal under the act. That money had to be returned. I find it funny that what was found to be illegal for that 2008 Alberta Alliance Party has been found legal in this case, an incredible double standard, I would mention in that regard. I think that the Chief Electoral Officer should maybe take a look at the differences between the two and help us understand the differences between the two. There really wasn’t any difference between the two except that one was found illegal, and the one that your party did was found not to be illegal, a bit of a double standard.

In any event, that’s the first piece. The second amount that he was talking about . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, I hope we’re going to have a clear airing on this because once we get into discussing internal party

matters, they are really not in order in this House. The clarification has been given. If you have something briefly to wrap up, I'll certainly allow it because I want this matter done and settled once and for all. Then we'll make a ruling on it accordingly.

Mr. Anderson: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. I would mention that he brought this up, and I'm just trying to clarify the comments that were completely unfounded and untrue.

To close, I'd say that besides that bridge loan that was found to be illegal and was given back, there was an amount of money donated by Mr. Thorsteinson and his family members in separate cheques. Never once was the money bundled. It was always in separate cheques, and it was over a five-year period, from 2004 to 2008. It was not one cheque or one bank draft for \$430,000. Completely different.

I want to thank the member for actually making our case that what your party did was completely inappropriate. What happened here was actually something that wasn't even done by our party, so get your facts straight, and please withdraw your comments.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice to respond.

Mr. Denis: First off, Mr. Speaker, none of my comments dealt with loans, just donations, so we won't deal with that. None of my comments dealt with separate cheques. I simply, as I tabled those documents earlier, just a few minutes ago, indicated, again, that this individual, his family, and his corporation in '04 donated \$97,500; in '04 during the campaign, \$95,000; in '05, \$2,000; and in '07, \$150,000.

3:10

Mr. Speaker, the member is quite correct – please check the records of Elections Alberta if you don't accept my particular memory in this case – that on January 19, 2008, the Wildrose Party and the Alberta Alliance Party merged into one entity. But even after they merged, \$120,000 from that former leader's amount in addition to his corporations and family, which is 23.3 per cent in 2008, when that party still exists today. It is still under the elections' rules and listed on the Elections Alberta website as the Wildrose Alliance Party. That's the total amount, \$464,500. Despite what all the naysayers may say, it's unfortunate that this member in particular seeks to run from his party's record.

Mr. Speaker, truth is an absolute defence. We simply have a good debate here, and what I've stated is entirely, 100 per cent true.

The Speaker: Well, hon. members, I have to tell you that I am disappointed that this matter would even be brought forward. Help me out here. How many times have I reminded you that matters dealing with internal party issues ought not be raised or brought forward in this House? Five, six, seven? I think about eight different times. Now, I could stand here and read them all to you again, and it would take me about 30 minutes to do that.

I would hope that we could, please, forever stop raising issues to do with internal party matters because they not only have no place here, but no one here has the jurisdiction within which to actually address those matters. There is a government. The government has policies, procedures, practices, finances, and so on, and they are here to be responsible and account for how they are determined and how they are applied. Opposition and private members, you have the role to ensure the government is doing that and to hold them to account on government matters.

If you want to go into this a little bit further, just be reminded of one of our favourite books, *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, where it says on page 504, with a lead-in from earlier,

that a question should not “concern internal party matters, or party or election expenses.” Anything to do with parties is always going to give rise to some kind of debate in this House. It's going to provoke some members to say things that in my experience over the years they have then lived to regret. So far we haven't seen too much of that, but we're on the cusp of that.

I'm going to ask you for the last time. I'm just not going to entertain any more stuff that has anything to do with internal party matters. It wastes time, it's beyond the jurisdiction of the House, and it is out of order to do so. I don't know how I can be more clear.

We've had the Member for Airdrie clarify his position. We've had the Minister of Justice clarify his position. That clarification has been offered. It's now in *Hansard* for others to read and learn from. Let us not visit this particular tack or this particular vein of questions or answers going forward, please. That concludes that matter.

Let me move on. A second point of order was raised at 2:10 – I believe it was the Government House Leader – with reference to something that the leader of the New Democrat opposition had raised.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Point of Order Insisting on Answers

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise in accordance with Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j). The leader of the fourth party, in his preamble during this question, made comments. I don't have the Blues in front of me, so I could be corrected, but the statement was basically the fact that the Premier didn't care enough to get up and answer the question.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's very clear. You've ruled on this yourself, and it's in *Beauchesne's* at 419 and 420. As the government determines who answers the question, it's quite appropriate for the Premier to get up and talk about issues in the House and deal with matters of a broad nature in public policy and vision and direction, but it's also very clear that the Premier has the ability to ask specific ministers to speak to specific questions within their purview. Again, this was a specific incident, Mr. Speaker, and it was quite appropriate for the Minister of Health to get up and speak on that.

I'd ask that the member of the fourth party withdraw his remarks.

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

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I find this interesting. Of course, if an individual member is not in attendance, you can't speak of their absence, certainly, but within the bounds of rhetoric in talking about the issue of the day, in this case the seniors issue, it's not inappropriate considering how the argument was just previously made. I believe the member said something to the effect that you won't find a Premier that cares more about seniors. In reference to that, I think that it was not inappropriate that the leader of the New Democrats should at least invite the Premier to make comment on this issue.

Certainly, people can have a feeling or a sentiment that they are caring about a particular group or an issue, but I am a person that subscribes to the idea that you judge a person based on their actions and not just their rhetoric. When I look at the seniors file, we get inflamed about it because it is so important to all of us to

ensure that we look after not only the people who are in care and seniors at the moment but also ensure that the policy is in place in the immediate and long-term future for future seniors, which could include all of us, hopefully, if it's our ambition to become a senior one day. You know, it's not an issue that's just on the side of anyone's plate.

We believe that it's very important that we hear from the very highest level. We make an invitation to the very highest level of the government here to talk about seniors' issues and to give us their opinion because we saw on one hand, for example, these promises that were made in regard to seniors. Then this budget comes and hits us on the back of the head, and we end up with, for example, the promised \$20 million education tax subsidy suddenly taken off the table. I know in my constituency this affected seniors a great deal, and they were very disappointed. It really did affect those on a fixed income considerably.

Again, out of the blue this seniors drug plan came out, and we know from the last time just how potentially devastating that can be to certain groups. They haven't set the levels for cut-offs yet, but we see at least \$180 million globally coming out of this and onto the backs of seniors, who are having to pay a higher amount.

Then, you know, there was this whole cut to this seniors' income subsidy as well, affecting at least 9,000 seniors.

The Speaker: Hon. member.

Mr. Eggen: Yes.

The Speaker: I appreciate your waxing away, but it has nothing to do with the point of order. The point of order that has been raised is under 23(h), (i), and (j) or in that vicinity, so if you would just conclude in response to what the deputy House leader has offered by way of the point here. It has to do with something that your leader said. I have it here in the Blues, where he said at 2:09 or 2:10, "Well, it's unfortunate that the Premier doesn't care enough to get up and answer these questions." He went on to say, "This government can't be trusted to protect our seniors." That is what the issue here is, hon. member, not about your interpretation of the budgets. Please wrap up.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes. I mean, that's a good, succinct way to come to a conclusion on this. This is an issue talking about caring and talking about specific issues on this, and we need to hear from the highest level about how and where the government is going on all these issues because these few broken promises that I brought up here are not just rhetorical points. They are affecting real people.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Horner: Just to add, Mr. Speaker, because the Member for Edmonton-Calder is missing the point here, that Standing Order 23(i) is about imputing a false motive to another member. We're all hon. members in this House. To suggest that what the member said does not impute the motive that the Premier doesn't care is ridiculous, and they should withdraw the comment. It does impute a motive to the Premier that is not true. In fact, the hon. member heard from the highest level as designated by the Premier, which is entirely within her purview. It does not mean that she doesn't care. In fact, it means she cares a great deal because she wants the right answer to come from the right person. This hon. member should be told to tell his leader to retract the comments.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

3:20

The Speaker: Well, hon. members, the Deputy Government House Leader on behalf of the Government House Leader has risen on this point of order, which I just read for you according to what the Blues said. I want to make a couple of comments here quickly. First of all, I know I've reminded you of this before, but I'll remind you again. When a question is posed to government, regardless of the person to whom it is posed, any member of Executive Council is allowed to answer that. We all know this by now surely. We've been here for about a year. In this particular case, we have questions that sometimes get posed to the Premier, and the Premier has the full ability to either answer the question herself or to delegate it to one of the other members of Executive Council. It's how the system works.

In fact, if you looked at *Beauchesne's* 419, it clearly says:

The Prime Minister . . .

And in this case we could take that to be our own local Premier.

. . . answers for the government as a whole and is entitled to answer any question relating to any ministerial portfolio and matter of policy. Likewise, the Prime Minister is entitled to delegate this responsibility to the Deputy Prime Minister . . .

Read into that the Deputy Premier for our purposes.

. . . even when the Prime Minister is present in the House.

Then *Beauchesne's* 420 reads as follows:

The Speaker has stated, "Of course, the Chair will allow a question to be put to a certain Minister; but it cannot insist that that Minister rather than another should answer it."

So that's one point.

There are other references, and I know you'll want to hear this because it comes from our favourite book, *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*. On page 509 the first sentence says, "Questions, although customarily addressed to specific Ministers, are directed to the Ministry as a whole." In other words, they're able to be answered by perhaps associate ministers or by others on Executive Council.

I find that the way that the comment was made by the leader of the New Democrat opposition violates those particular rules. The rules are very clear, and what happens when we violate a rule or we breach a rule in one way or another is that points of order get raised again, time gets wasted, admonishments have to be given, and the rest you've heard from me many times before.

These kinds of shots, if you will, under the table are really not in keeping with the spirit of the House, and they're certainly not reflective of the vast amount of experience that all of you bring to this House from your own private lives and the kinds of shots you wouldn't be taking at that level. So why take them here when you know they are a breach?

While I'm up, I want to make another quick comment which ties in with this. Frequently we have people playing these little games, as I will call them, where they know very well that the person from the front bench is out of the room. I know we're not allowed to refer to their absences. They may have gone to the washroom. They may be dealing with an urgency. They may be helping one of your constituents, for all you know, or they might be representing the cause elsewhere. But the questions sometimes get posed to that member knowing full well that the member isn't present.

I know how the game works. I've been at this for 20 years. It tends to point out someone's absence. Now, the same could be done toward opposition leaders, and I would hope that we wouldn't stoop to that. So far we haven't, but I would ask opposition members to please review that practice. It's cute to a point. You've made your point. Let's not try to make it over and over again, or we will again have to have this wastage of time to

address points of order. I fully anticipate, based on notes that I've gotten and collected over the last few weeks, that that will in fact be the case.

I hope that has clarified that. Accordingly, hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, I would ask you to connect with your leader and ask him to withdraw those comments unless you're prepared to do that now. I'll offer you that opportunity.

Mr. Eggen: Yes. Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Thanks for your edification on these issues. Based on that, I would on behalf of the leader of the New Democrats withdraw those comments here today.

Thanks.

The Speaker: Thank you very much. Those comments have been officially withdrawn. We appreciate the co-operation.

Third and final point of order.

Point of Order

Explanation of Speaker's Ruling

Mr. Anderson: Actually, under Standing Order 13, clarification. To your last point, Mr. Speaker, there are often times when we have a health question, for example. If that minister is not in the House and the Premier is not in her chair, we don't know who to direct the health question to. In that case, what do we say? Do we just say, "To the government," or do we say, "To the person representing the Health minister"? What do we say?

The Speaker: Hon. member, you would know this from your previous experience. Every minister has someone who covers them in their absence. In fact, there are typically two. The question could be posed, just as you've said, to any member of government who wishes to respond – that's totally appropriate because anyone, in fact, can – or as another way to the acting Minister of Health or to the Deputy Premier or to any member of Executive Council. There's an associate minister. You have a number of options. Suffice it to say that government members always have at least one if not two or more acting ministers who are ready and usually up to speed to jump in and answer any of those questions.

Now, did we have a third point of order? I believe we did. Airdrie, you rose on a point of order, something to do with the Minister of Education's comments. Citation, then please proceed.

Point of Order

Factual Accuracy

Mr. Anderson: Again our favourite passages, 23(h), (i), (j), and (l). As you know, sometimes with these points of order we do need to call them in order to clarify something that is just completely false from the other side. I'll be brief on this one and just say that the Minister of Education quoted or seemed to be inferring, anyway, that he was quoting from the Wildrose literature that 30 per cent of the schools being built by the government were not needed. That, of course, is not in the literature anywhere.

We would indeed spend less – that is in the literature – on schools. If we had an infrastructure priority list for schools, we'd actually be able to know what that entailed. It would entail, obviously, that some of the schools that the government is building this year – there might be five or six that would not be built this year under a Wildrose government – would have to wait till the next year. They would be at the top of the priority list the very next year and built the very next year. We feel that not only is it important to build schools, Mr. Speaker, but it's important to

not go into debt and leave our children holding the bill for those schools. There has to be a balance; otherwise, we'd just build 300 or 400 or 500 schools. Obviously, we have to have a balance between building the schools that we need and staying and living within our means.

The point here with the Education minister is that he inferred that we said in our literature that 30 per cent of the schools that they would build are not needed or are unnecessary. That is completely false. It's true that several may have had to wait an extra year to be built, but it's false to say that we would claim that they're not needed. I would ask him to withdraw that remark.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Campbell: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hate to take up your time because we do have some important bills to pass. What the minister said was accurate. As a matter of fact, in 2011 under their alternative budget the Wildrose Alliance Party was going to cut \$2.74 billion out of our capital, which at the time was \$7 billion, 30 per cent. In 2012 the Wildrose Alliance Party said that they'd cut about \$1.623 billion out of our budget, which was \$5.6 billion, again 30 per cent.

3:30

As a matter of fact, in audio from February 13 of this year the hon. member was quoted as saying, I quote: we don't have a problem with a lack of money for building new schools; we've got buckets of it; the problem is that we keep on putting a lot of our schools – I would say up to 30 per cent of the schools that we build are in areas where the priority isn't there; it just isn't.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Education answered the question I think in a very fair manner, and I don't think there's any point of order here.

The Speaker: Is there anyone else who wishes to participate? No.

Well, hon. members, right around 2:32 p.m. the hon. Minister of Education, in response to a question from I think it was Chestermere-Rocky View, said the following among other things:

Mr. Speaker, this is ironic, that we've got a group that's advocating for us to build more schools when they said that a good 30 per cent of the schools we're building don't need to be built. In addition, their alternative budget last year wanted us to cut our infrastructure budget by \$1.623 billion. That's a very specific number with no list. The year previous it was \$2.74 billion. That's a very specific number with no list. I think they should look at themselves in the mirror.

That's a quote according to the Blues. We'll see how they actually come out, but I'm sure it'll be fairly close to that.

Now, the Minister of Aboriginal Relations has defended this point from Airdrie, and I think the hon. Member for Airdrie is looking for clarification more than anything here.

This issue, again, has come up time and time and time again in different words, in different statements, in different positions. I, for the life of me, don't know why we're trying to debate two budgets in this House, one by the government and one by the Official Opposition. I've never heard of such a thing ever before, but it seems to be going on in this House now and going on out there as well. Why? I'll never know.

We have one official budget that is running the province, and that is the one that we should be concentrating on. That is the one we should be debating. That is the one for which, government members, you are being held accountable, not the opposition's budget or whatever you might want to refer to it as. It's just very strange for me in my 20 years to experience that.

Nonetheless, in conclusion, I want to just cite something from *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, where it says:

Members may not insist on an answer nor may a Member insist that a specific Minister respond to his or her question. A Minister's refusal to answer a question may not be questioned or treated as the subject of a point of order or question of privilege.

The Speaker ensures that replies adhere to the dictates of order, decorum and parliamentary language. The Speaker, however, is not responsible for the quality or content of replies to questions. In most instances, when a point of order or a question of privilege has been raised in regard to a response to an oral question, the Speaker has ruled that the matter is a disagreement among Members over the facts surrounding the issue.

The Speaker has no knowledge of what the actual facts in this case might be, but I've heard both sides explain their positions, and this matter has now been clarified, so let us move on and hopefully not visit this particular issue in this nature again if at all possible.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 23 Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2013

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

Mr. Horner: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and to move second reading of Bill 23, the Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2013.

This is largely a housekeeping bill that will amend our personal and corporate income tax acts and align the tax laws with changes that have occurred recently in the federal tax system. There are also some portions of the act where we would repeal the Alberta Income Tax Act, which, when we moved to the single rate system in 2001, was replaced by the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act.

Repealing the Alberta Income Tax Act will help clean up the books. It will also facilitate the repeal of the related tax deductions regulation and thereby support the regulatory review process by helping to remove legislation that is no longer needed. Legal counsel and the Canada Revenue Agency have both confirmed that the act can be repealed without any negative consequences.

The bill will also amend the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act. These amendments will address recent federal changes to the Canada child tax benefit program regarding parents who share custody of their children. Because the Alberta family employment tax credit piggybacks on the Canada child tax benefit administration system, Alberta's legislation must also be changed. The amendments related to parents with shared custody spread the payment of the credit out more evenly over the year and do not change the level of benefit provided.

The amendments to this act will also repeal the sections pertaining to the Alberta resource rebate program and the NHL players' tax. As these programs are no longer in effect, we no longer require the related legislation and regulation. Other amendments are for housekeeping purposes or to ensure Alberta's legislation properly references applicable sections of the federal Income Tax Act.

The bill also includes changes to the Alberta Corporate Tax Act. When applying the scientific research and experimental development tax credit, corporations are permitted to include a

proxy amount for overhead expenses. Concerns were raised that this proxy rate was overgenerous and inappropriately increased the cost of the credits to the government. As a result, the federal government reduced its rate in its 2012 budget. Amendments to this act will maintain our consistency with federal law by reducing the Alberta rate to match the federal change. The scientific research and experimental development tax credit continues to give researchers more access to funds to support their work and support research and development in Alberta. Taxpayers will still be able to claim the credit on the full amount of their itemized eligible overhead expenditures.

Changes to the act will also be made in regard to the discretionary deduction for a capital gains reserve. Capital gains are taxable in the year that the asset is sold. However, corporations can defer tax on the gain by claiming a reserve when some portion of the proceeds on the sale are still receivable. With this bill if a corporation claims a reserve for federal purposes, it will also have to claim the same reserve for Alberta purposes.

Alberta's corporate income tax system parallels federal law but generally permits corporations to claim different amounts of discretionary deductions. In this case this opportunity is being eliminated to ensure the deductions are fair for everyone. This response is consistent with what we've done in the past when we think a discretionary deduction has the potential to be misused. It does not eliminate the deduction but leaves corporations in the same tax position in Alberta as they would be in almost all other jurisdictions in Canada.

Finally, amendments in this bill parallel federal policy that requires large corporations to pay 50 per cent of amounts in dispute. This policy aids in the collection of amounts from corporations that may or may not have been an ongoing presence in Alberta when the tax issue is finally resolved.

In summary, the Tax Statutes Amendment Act will remove legislation that is no longer needed, strengthen the tax system against abuse, align Alberta's tax law with changes made by the federal government, and support the regulatory review process. As I said, Mr. Speaker, this is mostly a housekeeping bill in alignment with the federal changes.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I now move to adjourn debate of Bill 23, the Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2013.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 24 Statutes Amendment Act, 2013

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and move second reading of Bill 24, Statutes Amendment Act, 2013.

This is an omnibus act that will address the Condominium Property Act, the Emblems of Alberta Act, the Perpetuities Act, and the Surveys Act and update portfolio names of different departments and associated organizations.

From a Service Alberta perspective the amendment to the Condominium Property Act will help improve protection for approximately 1,300 bare-land condominium corporations representing 40,000 owners. This is an important issue that can be addressed.

3:40

Clarifying the authority of corporations, Mr. Speaker, in a court decision the Alberta Court of Queen's Bench ruled that bare-land condominium corporations cannot use reserve funds to maintain

or repair property that their bylaws obligate them to manage outside of the requirements of the Condominium Property Act. This ruling has had a significant impact for bare-land condominiums, typically being single-family detached homes, townhomes, or duplexes. The corporations in many of these types of developments are often required by their bylaws to look after what is known as managed property. This can include the building's exterior, roofs, lawns, and other structures attached to the property. For years bare-land corporations have been paying for major repairs or replacements of this property from their reserve funds.

The impact of the court's decision is far reaching. Between 90 and 95 per cent of bare-land condominium corporations are responsible for taking care of managed property, and as a result of this decision corporations are not able to use their reserve funds to cover the expenses associated with managed property and will have to finance the cost on a pay-as-you-go basis. This, obviously, Mr. Speaker, places undue hardship on condominium owners, who must cover the cost to maintain managed property by paying potentially large assessments, often within a very short period of time.

The amendments would allow bare-land condo corporations to use their reserve funds to cover these expenses for managed property as long as it's allowed in the corporation's bylaws. Mr. Speaker, this is the way they've been functioning since the first bare-land condominium corporations came around in the 1980s. We will be giving them certainty and clarity in this.

The Service Alberta condominium consultation that we just concluded also looked into this specific issue, and nearly 90 per cent of Albertans who responded agreed that the corporations should be allowed to precollect these funds from unit owners to maintain and repair managed property as they've been doing, as I said before, since the 1980s.

Bare-land unit owners have expressed support for this through many public engagements and through a lot of correspondence with me. It's critical that we address the issues to give bare-land condominium owners and corporations the clarity and certainty they deserve in dealing with repair and maintenance issues. This is an immediate action we can take to address the challenge for many, many condominium owners.

I should add that additional changes will be coming to the Condominium Property Act as we review the input Albertans have provided in the consultation. I hope that all parties can come together to support this bill. This is a positive step that will have a very positive impact. It's very much needed as a result of the court decision that came out, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you very much, and now I move to adjourn debate on Bill 24.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mrs. Jablonski in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill 18 Pooled Registered Pension Plans Act

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to the bill?

The hon. Associate Minister of Finance.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. It's a pleasure to rise in committee to speak in a little bit more detail about this particular piece of legislation that our government has been proud to put forward to the floor of the Legislature and proud to have been a leader in bringing this to life here in our country. You know, obviously, the federal government deserves to be commended for its leadership on this, introducing legislation and passing it last fall so that other provinces can harmonize their legislation with what they've put together. That's exactly what we have with the majority of this particular bill and the clauses in this bill. It very much mirrors and harmonizes with the federal government's. We're hoping that all the other provinces follow suit with our particular province and that we have an effective, portable, and harmonized privately administered pension regime for small businesses and self-employed people here in this province, of course, and right across Canada.

As I mentioned, other provinces are looking at this legislation. Saskatchewan has tabled similar legislation. B.C. has tabled similar legislation, as has Quebec. In some of those instances the electoral cycle has provided a barrier to getting that legislation passed, but we're hopeful that other provinces will be following suit.

I thought there was some really interesting discussion during second reading of this particular bill, Madam Chairman. I would like to just start by making some broad comments, and then I'll get into some specific answers that we have for some of the questions that were asked during some of the debate in second reading.

One of the broad comments that I would like to mention though, Madam Chairman, is that there's no doubt that there is a conversation going on in this particular country around pension reform or this concept of whether individuals, citizens of Canada, have sufficient pension incomes to support themselves and their families or their spouses when they retire. One of the discussions that is happening at the federal-provincial-territorial finance ministers' meetings and tables is the idea around the sufficiency of the Canada pension plan. There are a number of comments that would suggest that it's an either/or, that we should reform the Canada pension plan and this would not be necessary. That's actually the furthest from the truth. We're not in the position of trying to decide between one or the other, and in fact those conversations can happen.

At the end of the day what we have is that the Canada pension plan is certainly going to provide some sort of level of retirement savings for all Canadians. It's a universal program for all Canadians. I think we should have that discussion, and that discussion, again, is happening. But at the same time retirement savings are something that people need to be involved in personally.

You know, we all have different levels of quality of life that we want to ensure when we retire, and it's not the responsibility of this government or of the government of Canada to be involved in determining what comfort level we as individuals want to have when we decide to retire. That is one hundred per cent our responsibility as individuals. Some might decide that they don't need as much money to retire, that when they retire, they'll live modestly. You know, they will have a small house that they'll live in, and they will do very little travelling, these types of things. Others may decide that their retirement needs are different and that they need to save a lot more money. They might decide that when they retire, they want to travel. They might decide that they want to have two houses, one so that they can visit family where they live here in Alberta, and one where they can get away from some of the nasty weather that we have in the winter.

3:50

These are personal, individual choices. People's retirement planning must reflect that particular desire. There's no right or wrong to any of it. It's just a personal taste; therefore, the government should not be involved in providing pension plans, public pension plans, government-funded pension plans that start to differentiate between the two of them.

No matter what conversations happen with the Canada pension plan, Albertans, Canadians are going to need other savings vehicles to do their retirement planning around that will help meet their individual retirement needs. That's why this isn't an either/or debate, and I want to make that very clear. The Minister of Finance is with the federal-provincial-territorial finance ministers, and they are having those discussions right now around reform of the Canada pension plan. While interrelated, it is a separate issue, and we need not rush into making a decision that is either/or.

I do want to make some broader comments after I answer some of the questions that came up in second reading. First of all, I know that the hon. Member for Airdrie had put forward the concept of whether there should be contribution parameters for the self-employed and whether they should be different than regular employees as earnings are often retained in the company.

The challenge is this. While individuals are free to contribute – self-employed or not, they can contribute, and they're free to do so – an incorporated business can make contributions to the employer as the employer or the owner of that particular company. Even if it's their business, the company can still make a contribution into a pooled pension plan on behalf of that employer. What the limit is would be a federal tax matter, not a matter that is in the purview of this particular legislation. I just wanted to get that on the record.

There were questions about a PRPP provider going bankrupt. What are the consequences, and are members of that particular pooled pension plan protected? The answer is yes. Funds are not part of the overall assets of the provider. They're held in trust and protected from creditors.

There were questions as to: why not have a legislated cap on costs or at least indexing to inflation? What we are doing is defining the low cost, which I mentioned in second reading. We will be defining it in regulation, and it will mirror the federal regulation, which defines the cost as less than that of a pension plan of 500 or more members. We believe that this is a good starting point for what we're considering, essentially bulk pricing, for these types of products. Then institutions themselves at that threshold will be able to compete amongst themselves as part of the marketplace to be able to lower costs for investors. I would suggest that those that are offering the lowest costs below that particular threshold are likely to attract more members just based on the ability of people to go out and look at different plans. That is one of the questions that we wanted to answer.

There was a question about what the tax benefits are to employers that offer pooled registered pension plans. I mentioned this briefly in second reading. I'll indicate again that employers would not be paying CPP and EI as they would on group RRSP contributions since the contributions under PRPPs would not be part of employee income. There is a bit of a different treatment there. There will be a tax benefit for employers. Again, it's not required, but if they so choose to make a contribution or match a contribution to a pooled registered pension plan, there will be tax benefits that don't exist under contributions that are made using a group RRSP. When members talked about this being essentially a glorified RRSP program, it's simply not true. There are significantly different benefits or advantages to offering a pooled registered pension plan rather than a group RRSP.

There was a question around whether the government will commit to making public the information available to and disclosed by the superintendent under part 1, section 5 of the act. This would all depend on the type of information and purpose as there may be proprietary information involved and FOIP restrictions on what information may be public. For public reporting purposes of policy outcomes and the evolution of the PRPP initiative, for example, some information would likely be used and disclosed.

Another question was: do the necessary economies of scale for the low-cost provision depend on all provinces implementing this? That's something that would definitely help for the provision of achieving that low cost, but it's not a necessary success factor. It all depends on the overall size of the plan. You can get sufficiently sized pooled plans just from offering here in Alberta, but I think that from a financial institution's standpoint the more that you're able to pool in the various plans, the more you're able to lower the per-unit management and administrative fees, which, again, will accrue to those that are members of these plans, the average, hard-working Albertans and their families. The success of this initiative doesn't necessarily rest on all provinces signing up.

There were questions about the nature and necessity of bilateral agreements. Because not all jurisdictions are implementing this legislation at this particular time, there needs to be the ability for sequential bilateral agreements, that are necessary to make sure that these plans and legislation and mechanisms are harmonized right across the country.

There were a few more questions regarding authority of the superintendent to change the administrator in section 13. The question was: is the government liable or accountable for outcomes of the change in administrator, including losses? Are there any requirements to notify plan members? Members are protected via the superintendent's power to transfer funds to a new entity if necessary. All members would be notified accordingly, and no investment decisions would be made on behalf of them without consent. This will be in the regulation.

Another question was: how many institutions are currently licensed PRPP providers? There are none yet, obviously, because we don't have the legislation in place; however, there are a number of insurance companies, trust companies, and other financial institutions that have expressed a keen interest to become licensed to develop products and offer these in the Alberta marketplace.

Finally, we had a question about whether there are any measures in place to protect employees who may come forward with allegations of inducements. There are already measures in place to discourage inducements and actions the superintendent can take around those. If employers take any wrongful action against an employee, the employee would have legal recourse, as they would in any other situation. Evidence of inducements is monitored carefully by the superintendent of pensions.

Those were just some of the questions that were asked as part of second reading, Madam Chairman. I just wanted to talk about one particular thing. There was a comment made during second reading by one of the members. I believe it was by the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. He made a comment about this not being in the interests of Albertans and it being in the interests of the financial institutions. I take particular offence to that. The reason is that there's no doubt that members of that particular party have a different perspective of society and the role of government in society. There's no doubt that members of that

particular caucus have a very paternalistic view of the role of government, and they may particularly believe that the role of government is to save for people's retirement because either they're not smart enough or don't have the will to be able to do it themselves.

4:00

We over here on this side of the Legislature and, I think, probably some other members of opposition parties have the view that while the government does have a particular role to provide a safety net for individuals, the government can't be there to do everything for people. There is a level of personal responsibility in our particular society that rests at the individual level, and certainly retirement savings is one of them. I think that any time we can provide individuals with more options and break down more barriers so that they can take it upon themselves to invest in their future, invest in their retirement, and utilize certain tools and mechanisms, we should be very, very proud of doing that and of offering them that option.

This isn't an easy area. As I mentioned in second reading, there are a number of excuses and barriers that people can use that will prevent them from putting away sufficient funds. This is an opportunity, Madam Chairman – and I point to section 33, where automatic membership is required – that if an employer decides to offer this, all of their employees are enrolled. We specifically put in that onus because we want to make people make the decision themselves to opt out, and we want them to understand that there are consequences in doing so. That's why that particular clause under section 33 of the act is in there. We want them to make a conscious decision. It is their personal decision. They do have the option to opt out. We do know that for some people there are particular individual circumstances where they might do that, and that's why we've built the flexibility into this plan.

At the end of the day this comes down to individual personal responsibility. We on this side of the House and, again, I think other members as well, but particularly on this side of House, believe it is a personal responsibility for individuals to be involved in saving in their retirement fund and determining what level they want and what sort of financial mechanisms they want to put their money into, to be able to do that. We do not believe that this is the sole purview of the government, to take a paternalistic view and create a pension plan that protects people from themselves, which is, I think, the underlying premise that I got from the comments from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview in second reading.

So I wanted to clarify. This is a good-news story. We're helping people, hard-working Albertans, and giving them tools to plan for their future, to plan for their retirement so that they continue to enjoy a high quality of life through all of their years.

Thank you, Madam Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

Are there any other members? Any other comments or questions? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the Associate Minister of Finance and MLA for Calgary-Klein for the comments. I appreciate his answers. I could sort of see many of the questions that we had put forward in regard to this bill in your comments, and I appreciate the vigour with which you managed to address most of our concerns and reservations around this bill.

Certainly, we've had discussions from the outset of this bill in regard to the importance of having meaningful improvements to pensions and exposure to pensions not just in the province of

Alberta but right across the country. We have quite a low rate of people that do have a private-sector pension plan, you know, only about 18 per cent here in the province of Alberta compared to about maybe 40 per cent Canada-wide. We know that while our economy is growing and our population is growing and people are making money, Madam Chair, there is not the corresponding saving taking place here that would ensure a reasonable living for our same Albertans when they reach retirement.

You know, the premise of this bill or the global idea, I think, is trying to address that, and I appreciate that sentiment. I mean, I just found it a little bit disconcerting that we moved from the practical boots-on-the-ground sort of thing here, providing increased pension coverage to Albertans, to sort of a more ideological bent. I mean, I certainly can't just let those unsolicited comments go back towards the member. Yes, of course we're looking for pensions.

You know, it's curious that the member mentioned that, well, people make choices about what kind of retirement they have. But, I mean, really, most people end up with a substantial reduction in their income when they are retired, and it's not a choice, Madam Chair; it's a physical reality, right? Many Albertans spend a good deal of their income on their accommodation and on their food and on their transport and on looking after their kids and don't have a great deal of money to save for their retirement. So this notion that people make the choice I think is less reality and more fiction, certainly.

Also, interestingly, we have a program that's been around for many, many years, which is the Canada pension plan. If we did some, I guess, updating and some work on the maintenance of the Canada pension plan – I think we should encourage that. I know that the associate minister is not precluding the fact that you could have your PRPP as well as the Canada pension plan. Our concern is that this plan will perhaps compromise the integrity and the contribution and the commitment to the Canada pension plan. You know, it's not saying that it's six of one or half a dozen of the other, Madam Chair, but rather just reminding ourselves where we can make the most efficient investments to ensure that people will have the means by which to have a decent life in retirement.

You know, there are a number of issues that I have a problem with still. I know you talked about them a little bit. I mean, we all make investments for our future anyway, so the whole question of registered retirement savings plans – I know my own financial adviser is starting to suggest that maybe it's not really the best investment, that you're not getting the return that you should and that it's difficult to take that money out at the appropriate time. I just feel less than comfortable instituting an expansion of the RRSP program when it seems as though our financial sector planning for our futures is moving away from those very investments.

We know that we could put money and contributions towards more of the CPP benefit, which is more portable, which is larger, right? When we're talking about these investments, the economy of scale really does factor into play, Madam Chair, where if you have more people investing in something, you get a more efficient return. We just know that. So to update the CPP, the Canada pension plan, benefit from 4.95 per cent to 7.95 per cent would I think alleviate a lot of these concerns that people have about the future viability of the CPP here in Canada.

I think we see an initiative across the country, started by the federal Conservatives in regard to PRPPs, that we're trying to follow here. But I question, Madam Chair, that we don't necessarily need to just follow these things blindly. We know that in some other countries they've had problems. I've looked at

places like Australia that have put in PRPP mandatory plans with some opt-out provisions. This superfund required their employers to have their workers in one of these defined contribution plans, and I think we've seen that the jury is out on that Australian experiment. It hasn't been producing the results that they had hoped for. So always when we look at implementing something new, we should look at best practices from around the world and evidence-based decision-making from other experiences around the world. You know, I just don't see the Australian version of this operating particularly well.

4:10

Based on that, Madam Chair, we did have a number of specific questions that we wanted to bring forward. I think the court of public opinion is also relevant to what we're doing here because, of course, ultimately it's individual workers, people working here in Alberta, that we will be imposing some change on. We saw a Canada-wide poll from about three years ago showing that most Canadians and 66 per cent of Albertans were looking to an update and a solidification of the CPP benefits. Again, I think it's a reflection of the durability and the confidence that people have in our Canada pension plan plus the idea that people do really want to save for their future and want something there that is reliable and constant, right? We all have CPP taken off of our cheques now. You know, it's something modest to look forward to, but it's also something very secure regardless of the vagaries of market and so forth. If we make regulation that ensures the viability of CPP over the long term, then that's money you can take to the bank.

I mean, I'm certainly not precluding the possibility. I appreciate the associate minister's proposal here with Bill 18. We have been discussing it quite extensively in our caucus, so don't presume that we are just blindly following ideology. I think many of the questions or the analysis and the depth of analysis that you had alluded to in your speech, in fact, came from us. So, I mean, at least acknowledge that. We do try hard here and don't just follow the simple version of ideology that you might ascribe to us. In fact, we look for the best, most practical way to serve most Albertans now and in the future.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Madam Chair. It's a true privilege to speak to Bill 18, Pooled Registered Pension Plans Act. I appreciate the hon. minister for bringing this act forward. Although I'm not so certain about the tangible results that will be created by the implementation of this new program to the Alberta landscape or, in fact, to other provinces that are going down this path, I do appreciate the discussion it brings up, some of the points that will be made and some that have been made by members before me. Hopefully, I'll add to some of those comments. At least there's a recognition that our fellow Albertans often are not retiring with a large amount of money at their disposal, and we are trying to encourage them to in fact save more for their future.

I see this bill as being an outright reflection of the fact that the current system is not working. Otherwise, why would government be introducing this bill? If there is nothing to fix, this government wouldn't be putting any proposal before you.

I guess, as the hon. minister said, if individuals and companies truly knew what was best for their retirement and were truly

following through with everything that is currently available and the like, there would be no need for this bill. So I take those comments somewhat with a grain of salt. Government shouldn't act unless there is a problem to be solved. This act, just by the nature of its being in this Legislature and presented by the hon. minister, seems to be correcting a problem, that problem being that individuals are not saving enough for the future. We see this throughout Canada and throughout other jurisdictions, that individuals are not saving as much as they have in the past through whatever means. Whether it is through lack of preparation or a lack of ability, people are getting to their retirement years with not very much saved.

I know we can even go back to looking at the existing mechanisms that are out there for people to plan their retirement. The RRSP program, the registered retirement savings program, a very good program that encourages savings, encourages people to reduce their tax burden, and allows them to actually use government money to save for the future, is not taken up with any great shakes by the Canadian population. I think it is 50 per cent at best of Canadians that actually contribute to an RRSP.

With that being the case, one can make two deductions. Maybe they don't have the information. You know, I think that would be hard to believe. Ever since I've been old enough to understand this, RRSPs have been pushed by both the private sector and by other entities, that RRSPs are to be used and managed and that they're good mechanisms for the future.

I think an attempt to expand people's ability to save was through the TFSAs. I'm not sure what they're called, but TFSAs allow people to save an additional amount of money. Clearly, this is not happening. There's a recognition by this bill that there's a problem.

The second point to it, why governments may want to play a role in this. It's my greatest hope and the hope of everyone in here that despite all the rhetoric that individuals should have personal responsibility, that individuals should do this, that, and the other thing, and that individuals have the obligation to save for their future, if they don't, what happens then? Are we then just correspondingly supposed to say: "Well, no. You didn't do this. We provided you an opportunity through registered retirement savings plans, through TFSAs, through this pooled registered pension act. You were supposed to save for your future"? We don't.

There seems to be at least a recognition at this time that life is difficult for many people, that things aren't easily planned for, that there are kids to raise, that there is food to put on the table and clothes to buy. Yes, there may even be a little bit of: I'd rather have that big-screen TV than contribute to my RRSP. I recognize that, Madam Chair. There may be some of that thinking. I think that thinking draws back to: oftentimes I don't think human beings are great planners. You know, it comes back to that.

So what is the corollary of that? Regardless of whether we do it through this mechanism or at the end of their lives, government is going to have to play a role in assisting people. That happens. It happens now. It happens through our government currently subsidizing people over 65 in rental and housing situations when there's need. With many of those complexes run by the Trinity Foundation and other good entities, this government seems to recognize: hey, there are people who get to the 65-plus age and need assistance. We're going to continue to do that because, as we all know, who votes? Seniors vote. So that's going to continue, okay?

4:20

But back to the point here. I got a little sidetracked on why we need to have both a government response as well as, hopefully, encouraging seniors to save. If we look, then, at what the statistics say, that people currently aren't saving for their retirement through the existing means, what gives us any indication that this bill will substantially solve that problem? It won't, okay? As the hon. minister said, can it encourage people? Yes. Can it do a little more? Can it give people another option? Sure. I'd buy that. Good. But does it substantially solve the problem of seniors getting to 65-plus in need of a steady stream of income so that they can live life in a reasonable, dignified fashion? Does it address the problem that people are retiring at 65, to use a term, without a pot to take a leak in? Does this solve that problem? No, and hence the need for comprehensive CPP reform, okay? It simply has to be.

Let's call it what it is, CPP reform. It's a forced savings account for people. When they're working, the government takes money from their cheque and ensures that it is there in some form or fashion at the end of their lives. I guess it's a recognition, despite the hon. minister's comments, that sometimes life circumstances, individual choices, and the like are not necessarily happening that dictate an appropriate savings rate to absolve governments of their responsibilities to our fellow citizens that arise at 65. Given that that's the case, given that all evidence to the contrary says that this is happening and that this, unless I read it wrong, is not going to magically correct the problem, we need to engage in comprehensive CPP reform. It's my hope that this government understands that mechanisms like this, having more advertising about RRSPs, having more options like TFSAs out there, are maybe good and maybe make you feel good for a certain time, but it is not substantially correcting the problem.

In my view, the best way to ensure that people at least have an adequate system of retirement is through CPP reform. Yes, that does entail governments being involved in collecting a little bit from people's cheques and employers' cheques and ensuring that they are then pooled in a good system, like the CPP system is – it's efficiently run, efficiently managed, and the like – and then divvied out so everyone has a reasonable standard of living.

Will I be supporting this bill? Well, I'm not so certain, you know, whether I'll vote for it or against it. It doesn't really harm anything. I'll probably vote for it. But at the same time, I don't see it substantially solving a problem despite the rhetoric of what has been said. I think all evidence to the contrary indicates that this will not be good enough. All evidence of watching individuals and families contribute to RRSPs over the last 30 years tells us otherwise. If we continue to ignore that fact as government and as members of this House and cling to the notion that people are going to magically start getting it, are going to magically start understanding that they are going to live to be 88 years of age and they're not going to be able to work after 65, well, then I think we're just burying our heads in the sand and clinging to rhetoric.

Sometimes when a problem is so clear, a problem is so obvious, governments, despite what the political philosophy of the day is or despite what they internally believe, have to act. At the end of the day I hope all of us in this Assembly are not going to see people who have not adequately saved for their futures starve on the streets, where we look past them and say: "No. You didn't take individual responsibility for yourself or your family. No. You didn't do that." We're going to recognize that life is hard. We're going to recognize that things don't always work, that sometimes the best of intentions in life don't always lead to the end being that easy.

Those are my comments, Madam Chair. It's time for us, not only as legislators in this province but encouraging our federal government, to engage in some CPP reform.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Madam Chair. I am pleased to be able to get up to speak to this bill, a bill that we will be voting against because it is such an unfortunate missed opportunity. It is simply supporting the profoundly disappointing set of decisions made by the Harper government in their decision to abandon seniors in Canada and to refuse to engage in putting forward a meaningful income supports program for seniors like one that we would see in most other developed countries. That is essentially why we are voting against this. The bottom line is that this is a smoke-and-mirrors attempt to paper over the unwillingness of the Harper Conservatives to choose the interests of regular Canadians over that of many big business owners.

In our view, Canadians deserve to have meaningful improvements to their pensions. They absolutely do. What should have happened, Madam Chair, is that we should have been pushing the government much more aggressively to make changes to the Canada pension plan. Unfortunately, instead, this government under the former Minister of Finance, whose name I believe I can now mention, Minister Morton, in adopting not only Conservative policies but also policies of the Wildrose, very aggressively fought against the idea of increasing the Canada pension plan and increasing the benefits received through the Canada pension plan. As a result, this government actually played a role in pushing the Harper government to this very, very bad decision, a decision for which Canadians will be paying for many, many years.

It's interesting, Madam Chair, that if you look at what public opinion is on this issue, the fact of the matter is that in December 2010 a poll showed that 78 per cent of Canadians wanted CPP benefits increased. This included, even in Alberta, that 66 per cent of Albertans believed that CPP benefits should increase, and of course they should because, as you know, the CPP pension right now on its own is well, well below the poverty line. We need to address that because we have a growing number of seniors in our population. The Canada pension plan has been determined by many experts to be the absolute best mechanism for addressing retirement issues in Canada because, of course, we have failed to deal with that issue, as has happened in so many other jurisdictions.

4:30

Professor Jon Kesselman, the Canada research chair in public finance at the Simon Fraser University School of Public Policy says, and I quote: expanding the CPP is the best option for improving Canadian workers' retirement income security; it can ensure results that none of the many alternative reform proposals for private schemes can provide.

The CARP director of political advocacy, Susan Eng, writes: CARP remains committed to improving retirement benefits for the current crop of seniors, including increasing CPP, OAS and GIS payments, getting a moratorium on RRIF withdrawals, making access to tax-free savings accounts retroactive and lobbying to remove the HST on seniors' energy bills.

Albertans, in particular, require some kind of meaningful change. Forty per cent of Canadians actually have access to private-sector pension plans, defined benefit private-sector

pension plans, but in Alberta only 18 per cent of Albertans have access to those kinds of pension plans. So, in fact, more Albertans will likely be required to rely on CPP than the rest of Canadians, yet we advocated against their interests. So typical, Madam Chair.

Now, if you look at sort of the actual effectiveness of the kind of plan that this government is bringing in, Madam Chair, it's helpful to look at the experience in other jurisdictions. Australia apparently had a plan that was similar to the one this government is supporting Stephen Harper is bringing in. It was a little bit different because it required employers to enrol their workers. It was mandatory, and then workers had an opt-out as opposed to making the whole thing voluntary. But a recent review commissioned by the Australian government after 12 years of experience reported that the Australian superfund did not even match inflation, again because the fees that were being charged were eroding it.

Interestingly, even the *Calgary Herald*, Madam Chair, noted that

the CPP already covers almost all Canadian workers and thus spreads the risk and management fees. It's fully portable, offers guaranteed income to all retirees, and is the only risk-free investment broadly available to workers. Private RRSPs and employer pension plans have proven much riskier than initially billed. Those who are in company pension plans are likely in a defined contribution scheme [at this point], where the amount that goes in is predetermined, but the payout is based on how well the fund... ultimately performs. Nortel workers know only too well how that worked.

Madam Chair, this bill is not going to deal with the growing urgency of the income shortage that is going to be experienced by Canada's seniors. The Canadian Labour Congress has a plan, which, frankly, the federal NDP was in favour of, to gradually increase CPP over time and to double it so that rather than paying \$934 per month, it would eventually pay \$1,868 a month. Pretty much enough to live on if you're very, very careful. That would have brought Canada's system, well, not really as close to the U.S. but closer.

In the U.S. they pay \$30,000 a year. Right now in Canada the maximum benefit that we have is \$12,000 through the current version of CPP. We actually have one of the lowest guaranteed retirement income plans in all of the OECD. As we've talked about previously, the greater the gap between rich and poor and the greater the inequality in a society, the more damaging it is to the community as a whole. Interestingly, it's not just damaging to those who are poor, Madam Chair. It's actually damaging to everyone. It's actually even damaging to the chair of Enbridge or, you know, the regional rep for Walmart or whoever it is, whether wealthy or not wealthy. When there's great disparity between rich and poor, it damages the whole community.

So here we are in Canada with the lowest guaranteed retirement income plan in the OECD by about 50 per cent, and we are doing nothing to fix that problem, Madam Chair, and our federal government is doing nothing to fix that problem. This government is piling on through this piece of legislation and supporting...

The Deputy Chair: I hesitate to interrupt you, hon. member, but the noise level is getting just a little too loud. Hon. members, if we can keep it down. If you'd like to have any major discussions, you can take them to the room out there.

Thank you.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Again, our argument is that this government should reverse its previously hostile position to promoting and growing CPP benefits

to provide for true equality and greater income security across the country in order, as I said before, to bring us closer in line with what is offered in other OECD countries. CPP has a proven track record of professional management, low-cost administration, and reasonable rates of return. Through modest and mandatory savings the CPP provides the guarantee of defined benefits, which provide Albertans with unrivalled peace of mind. We would argue that it's therefore the best option for helping to secure a guaranteed future for Alberta's retirees. As I've said, only 18 per cent of Albertans have a private-sector pension plan versus 40 per cent Canada-wide.

We desperately need to have a mandatory pension program to ensure that Albertans do not retire into poverty, Madam Chair. This PRPP is a step backwards because it's not mandatory, and even when combined with federal benefits, it's still not enough to ensure that workers have sufficient money when they retire. This PRPP is simply glorified RRSPs. It's designed in such a way as to see the retirement savings of Albertans handed over to the financial sector, which, quite frankly, is the group that benefits the most from this piece of legislation. Anyone who's tried to cash in their RRSPs during the end of a business cycle will know that the financial sector fails to deliver on its promises with surprising regularity.

It's also important to note that during the great economic recession the CPP barely lost but a few percentage points in value while the stock market took a terrible tumble. It's likely that if the PRPP was around at the time, it would've lost an equivalent value to the stock market, not the CPP. PRPPs are entirely voluntary, and they contain no requirement for employers to match employee contributions. The benefits they pay are not guaranteed and are subject, as I said, to the vagaries of the stock market.

Of course, Madam Chair, that is what is at the heart of this and at the heart of the Harper government's refusal to deal with this issue and at the heart of this Conservative government's advocacy to ensure that the Harper government refuses to deal with this issue. It's simply this, that they're unwilling to ask employers to contribute to the retirement future of their employees. That is why we are creating a second class of retirees and we will create a generation of very, very poor Albertans, in particular.

Madam Chair, it is for these reasons that we will not be supporting this bill. Everyone does agree that our pension system in Canada requires improvement, and we believe our pension system in Canada and in Alberta requires improvement, but this legislation is so wrong-headed and so unable to provide any kind of meaningful benefit to Albertans and at the same time allows the federal government a certain amount of cover for their profoundly damaging and ill-advised decision to abandon seniors' futures in Alberta. We simply cannot support anything that would even indirectly support such a grossly ill-advised policy decision as that which our federal government has perpetrated on the majority of Canadians who require income support in their retirement, so we will not be supporting this bill.

Thank you.

4:40

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.
Are there any other members?

Hon. Members: Question.

The Deputy Chair: The question has been called on Bill 18, the Pooled Registered Pension Plans Act.

[The clauses of Bill 18 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Mr. Denis: I would now ask that the committee rise and report Bill 18, Madam Chair.

[Motion carried]

[Mrs. Jablonski in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: I'd like to recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-East to give the committee report.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 18.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.
Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading
(continued)

Bill 21
Environmental Protection and Enhancement
Amendment Act, 2013

[Adjourned debate May 6: Ms Jansen]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise in support of this bill, but there are a couple of issues that . . .

Mr. Denis: What's your experience?

Mr. Anglin: My experience is that I don't generally get listened to on the other side, but I will happily change that experience. They listen to me on this side, Madam Speaker.

I will say this. For the most part I will urge my fellow colleagues to support the bill, but there are some issues with the bill that I hope we can clean up or correct with some amendments when we approach Committee of the Whole. Where I have some real problems with this bill is how it was constructed. In my view, it was constructed backwards.

What I think we all agree on is that we need some sort of air quality monitoring system, and this actually came about with the joint Canada-Alberta implementation plan for oil sands monitoring, which I have the report for right here. When that report was first announced some time ago, many Albertans were in agreement with it, and the report actually has a number of provisions outlining how this should work.

From that, this legislation comes forward. As I understand it – and I hope the minister can clear up some of this before we even get into Committee of the Whole – the oil sands working group agreed to fund approximately \$50 million over and above both the federal and the provincial funding to implement this. What I would like to have seen is a world-class monitoring system constructed for implementation, and then we look at what it would have cost to implement and keep operating, and then we evaluate whether or not that was exactly what we wanted to do.

Now we look towards the funding and making it work. What I have heard from the stakeholders and the ministry itself is that they looked at the total dollar value that the industry was willing to invest in this, and now this is what we're looking to spend without actually having constructed or devised the air quality monitoring system. That is one problem I have, actually, with the bill, the way it was constructed.

There's another factor that is evident here. It was mentioned last night in the hon. member's speech when this bill was tabled for second reading, and then it was adjourned. This PIN, the personal identification number, for treating hazardous waste: what this bill will do is give the power to the minister to exempt certain companies or groups of people, as they're referred to, from this requirement. I'm concerned about that because there is a potential for dropping the ball here.

I understand why this provision was introduced. The idea is that these companies or classes of people, as they're referred to, are going to come under the jurisdiction of the single regulator. However, the way the legislation is drafted is broad enough that it is not just restricted to oil sands companies or, for that matter, the companies that would come under the single regulator. What we have is a broad exemption that the minister can grant but not necessarily where the single regulator would pick up the jurisdiction. That would be a very small category of companies or a small category of industry, but still there is a loophole there that could come back and haunt this government, come back and haunt the people of Alberta. That is one area that I was hoping we could correct with some of the amendments.

All in all, the idea is that our industry, our oil sands companies need this. They see the value in this. The environmental groups in this province want this. We as a government, as various parties within the Legislature, all agree that we have to do something for our monitoring system. Now, with that said, we also need something that actually will work, that is verifiable, that will give the confidence not just to the industry and to the environmental groups but to our customers, the rest of the international markets that are asking for this for the marketability of our own products.

With that, there seems to be general support for the bill. This is a good start. Industry is onboard. Environmental groups, I think, would love to see it strengthened. Myself, I would really want to have the minister explain in better detail how this exemption from the PIN is going to actually work in conjunction with the manifest that is required. What I see as I read the bill – and I'll stand to be corrected if the minister can correct me – is that this exemption would also eliminate some cases where a manifest is not necessary, and that, to me, would be a little bit too precarious for what we need to do in handling hazardous material.

With that, Madam Speaker, I will conclude by asking my fellow colleagues to take a serious look at this and support this bill. In the Committee of the Whole I will introduce a couple of amendments. Hopefully, the members across will hear that, and maybe my experience will change.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Airdrie.

4:50

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill 21, the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Amendment Act, 2013. As elected representatives there are two duties that are likely among our most important responsibilities. They are, first, to help make Alberta an even better place than when we were first elected and, two, to do all we

can to enhance and protect our province for future generations, for our children, and for our grandchildren. With these two guiding principles in mind, I look forward to voting in support of Bill 21.

Alberta's environmental and economic fortunes are inextricably linked. Government has a critical role in setting and enforcing regulations in order to protect the quality of Alberta's air, water, and land. Industry – oil sands and other resource developers – knows that they must minimize the environmental footprint of their activities and operate as responsible corporate citizens while they generate the jobs and prosperity that benefit all Albertans and beyond. We in the Official Opposition have always advocated for real measures that ensure clean air, clean water, and clean land. Every Albertan has a stake in the quality of our air, water, and land.

Alberta's emissions strategy needs to be expanded, and the focus needs to be on ensuring front-line monitoring and enforcement of regulations regarding air, water, and land quality instead of spending billions of taxpayer dollars on flawed ideas like giving \$2 billion to some of the largest corporations in the country to pump CO₂ into the ground. That is not a way to improve our environment and is not a wise use of tax dollars. Also, we would rather not see the expensive wealth redistribution schemes like cap and trade. We like the idea of a made-in-Alberta solution, and it starts with effective monitoring of emissions and enforcement of our CO₂ and other regulations.

In order to serve the best interests of Albertans and to earn the best possible reputation internationally, we must accept the reality that every new oil sands project is going to have environmental impacts. That's what development does. The key is to make sure each project operates under clear and consistent environmental parameters, with a clear strategy for how to reclaim the land as quickly as possible.

It is important for environmental and reclamation expectations and regulations to be predictable and consistent for developers and to be enforced by government, so I support this effort to enhance oil sands monitoring and to co-ordinate provincial and federal data on air, water, land, and biodiversity in the oil sands region. I also support making the information transparent and accessible so that all Albertans and people all across the globe can know that government and industry are fulfilling their joint responsibilities in oil sands development.

Oil sands development represents the pinnacle of technological advancement and innovative achievement, and industry constantly improves the efficiency and effectiveness of exploration, production, and value-added processing of this important resource. Oil sands and other resource developments also play a major role in providing government the resources to fund the priority social programs and services that are so important to Albertans as well as to save for future generations in the heritage fund. That is why it is important for the government to set clear and consistent rules and to enforce them so oil sands developers can operate with the confidence of Albertans that they are fulfilling their social licence to develop the resources owned by all our citizens.

I look forward to the debate and to amendments in Committee of the Whole in order to make this the best possible legislation governing environmental stewardship, hazardous materials, and protection of front-line enforcement officers as well. For example, I'd like to see the \$15-per-tonne carbon levy currently charged by the government, instead of going into a fund that winners and losers are picked out of, where we pick which technology we're going to fund here or which company we're going to fund there with that money, put into enforcement, monitoring our oil sands, keeping the regulations around our emissions, air and water quality, land quality, land reclamation, and so forth. I think that is

how we should be spending that money rather than giving it to private corporations to do what they should be doing anyway, frankly.

In closing, I think that as MLAs in this House we must make decisions that balance economic growth and opportunity with environmental stewardship and conservation. The two are not mutually exclusive. In fact, the statistics around the world – the proof, the evidence – are very clear. The more economically prosperous a jurisdiction is, the better the tools they have and the better the means they have and the more demand their people have for maintaining and improving their environment around them. I think that this is a truism, and we should never try to say that environmentalism and economic development are somehow mutually exclusive. That's just simply not the case.

Bill 21 is an important future step in fulfilling our obligations to current and future Albertans, and I very much look forward to supporting this bill. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is now in place. Are there any members that wish to use 29(2)(a) for questions or comments?

Seeing none, are there any other members that wish to speak on Bill 21 in second reading? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to rise to speak to Bill 21, the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Amendment Act, 2013. I'd like to start by thanking the officials from the ministry of environment who took the time to provide me and one of our caucus researchers with a briefing on elements of this piece of legislation.

I think it's really important to sort of start the discussion on this piece of legislation by looking a little bit at the history of this issue as it relates to this provincial government. You know, I can only go back so far. Although I often feel, Madam Speaker, like I've been here for decades, really it's only been five years. I remember – I think it was probably in the fall of 2008 – when I very nervously got up and posed one of my first questions to the minister of environment around the fact that a number of residents of Fort Chip were raising concerns, very serious concerns, about their health and very significant differences in terms of their health, which they attributed to development activities by the oil and gas industry upstream from where they lived.

At that time I was told with much disdain and a great deal of patronizing by the minister that, of course, we all knew that industry was having no impact – no impact at all – on the air or the water or the land in the oil sands region and that we were simply, you know, Chicken Little and that we were causing panic and that that was because our overall goal was to kill jobs. I'm pretty sure that that was part of it, that we lived to kill jobs, and therefore we were completely making this stuff up and were completely hysterical and that there was nothing to it. That was sort of the response that we would get from the government.

Of course, we would also get the age-old response: "You know, there are a few chemicals in the water here and there, but you know what? It's all naturally occurring, and it would be there with or without industry activity, and indeed industry is having no impact on the environment up there." I was assured of that over and over by the minister of environment, who told me how many wonderful scientists he had in his ministry and how they knew so much more about these issues than we did.

Anyway, Dr. Schindler and his colleague Erin Kelly in August of 2010 independently produced a report, an academically independent report. I don't know if it would still be produced in

the minister of advanced education's new postsecondary world. Nonetheless, it was produced there although I do believe it was mostly funded by international funders. It showed unequivocally in scientific, geeky terms that, in fact, there was impact on the environment as a result of industrial activity.

Notwithstanding that, the first response of this government and of the minister at the time, the former minister, Rob Renner, was, quote: my scientists are telling me that the amount of compounds that can be detected in the Athabasca River at this point is not a concern and is an insignificant level. Renner said: the fact remains that they are naturally occurring substances in the water, and if we had never set foot in the region, these kinds of results would still be there. Now, that was the minister of this government in August of 2010.

5:00

Well, in December of 2010 the Royal Society of Canada, which is basically the leading scientists in the whole country, reviewed Dr. Schindler's work and not only agreed with all that he had found but went further to say that they had no idea how it was that the minister of environment or any of the scientists who were briefing this minister of environment could even make the statements that the minister of environment had made because they weren't even doing the tests and the investigations that they would have had to do to make the statements that they made.

In essence, we had a Progressive Conservative minister of environment assuring the world that we were all hysterical and that their scientists told them that everything was just fine only to have actual scientists come in and tell them that their scientists had not actually even tested for the very thing that they were talking to the public about. Now, personally, Madam Speaker, in other jurisdictions that would have resulted in the resignation of the minister of environment. In this province, unfortunately, things are a little bit slower to happen. But it ought to have resulted in the resignation at that point of the minister of environment; nonetheless, it did not.

Then on December 17, 2010, there was another scientific report that was released which outlined, indeed, that the regional aquatics monitoring program was underreporting occurrences of deformed fish in the Athabasca River, the occurrence of which was actually hidden from the public for decades. So there you go.

Then by January of 2011 the government was forced by public pressure and also at that point by some international pressure to appoint its own environmental monitoring panel. Now, that panel went through its own hiccups. As I recall, there was a fellow who had his own economic interests at heart that basically conflicted him out of being on that panel, and they had to remove him because he was actually a lobbyist for water treatment systems.

In any event, by March of 2011 the minister had to finally backtrack on his assertions that RAMP was adequate and that all toxins found in the river were naturally occurring because their own committee released its findings saying: "You know what? Maybe this isn't quite as good as we thought." Finally, in March 2011 the federal government came to the table as well, and their scientists also said: well, you know, we've actually finally had a look at this, and we've also looked at Dr. Schindler's data. They also said that – who knew it? – Alberta had never really been testing, had never really been monitoring, and maybe someone ought to start doing that.

Quite honestly, Madam Speaker, this government's record on monitoring and protecting the environment and protecting the interests of the Albertans who live downstream from the industrial activity in the oil sands is shameful. They have actually never even come clean on the fact that they intentionally engaged in the

activity of misleading Albertans about their health. They've never even apologized for this shoddy record and these knowing efforts to mislead Albertans about how safe our water systems were in that particular area.

Nonetheless, though, international pressure, I suspect, is the primary reason why we are finally moving forward on some of this stuff. But the question is: how do we move forward? Do we move forward 85 per cent press release, 15 per cent action, or do we actually move forward with real action?

One of the key components as a result of this rather unfortunate and unseemly history of governance and public policy management by this government on this file was that almost everybody agreed that the government couldn't be trusted to continue with this work and that what needed to happen was that there needed to be an independent system of monitoring that was ultimately overseen by academically independent scientists who would do monitoring based on what the science told them to seek. That was one of the fundamental components of recommendations that came from this rather unfortunate history.

Then the provincial government and federal government got together, and they came up with their new dog-and-pony show, the joint monitoring program. Yes, they made some improvements. Yes, they increased the locations where they were engaging and monitoring in some cases, so there was a marginal increase in monitoring. And, yes, they also just very recently started releasing some of that information, not full information but pieces of that information, to the public more regularly. However, the independence, the independent body, the independent agency does not yet exist. The agencies that are doing the increased monitoring that is currently going on up there include among others the originally discredited RAMP.

This bill will essentially allow the government to stand between industry and the monitors, so collect money from industry and then give it to the monitors in order to ensure that it's not a direct model of industry funding the monitors. The idea is that perhaps that will result in a slight increase in quality, and maybe it will. But, again, you need to keep in perspective, Madam Speaker, the history of this government on this file and understand, when you look at that, that most people who are concerned about the health of their water and their ecosystem and the environment are, rightly so, somewhat untrusting of the degree to which they can rely on this government, not only those Albertans but also the international markets who are very closely watching the way in which we handle this challenge.

For that reason, we need to set up a system that is actually one that will gain trust. And for that reason, rather than bringing in at the very end of a session that they want to get out of really quickly an enabling piece of legislation that essentially says that the minister may make regulations about whatever the heck she wants, and then we can all go behind closed doors and do it, what should be happening is that the minister should be coming in here with, you know, a piece of legislation that would really define and change the culture and define and dictate a change in culture in this province, both with industry and within their own department and their own ministry and within their own benches, that would define and oblige a change in how we approach protecting the environment on behalf of all Albertans and future Albertans.

That's not what this legislation is. This legislation is, as is typical with this government, the kind of legislation that is written to ensure that the minister of environment will never have to come back into this Legislature if she can avoid it to have these issues discussed.

Mrs. McQueen: I will always be here.

Ms Notley: The minister says that she'll always be here. You know, she's often here. She's usually here. She's great at being here. But the point is: how often do we get to have a really thorough discussion about components, detailed components, of what makes a good environmental protection scheme and what does not make a good environmental protection scheme? Madam Speaker, the reality is that it's almost never.

If this government really wanted to convince our investors and our markets, not to mention our citizens, that they are serious about this, they would bring in a hallmark piece of legislation that actually stipulates the standards and the breadth and the scope and the application and the outcomes of this new environmental regime as opposed to simply saying: we're going to give the minister the authority to do whatever she thinks is appropriate in all her great judgment.

The reason I say this and the reason I started with that long and really unfortunate dark history is because when you've got a history like the one that this government has around the assertions and the assurances that they have made in this House and through this House and in the public to the public about the degree to which we should be trusting them on the environment, when you have that kind of shadowed history, you need to do something pretty big to win back trust. Simply asking Albertans to trust us isn't going to do it. You know, they're – what? – 21 per cent in trust, and there's a reason for it. So I'm disappointed that this legislation does not include much more specific guidance and direction with a vision towards where we're going to go.

Now, when we move further along, Madam Speaker, I will speak about certain components of the legislation that cause me some concern. There are elements of it that we need to know more about. As the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre pointed out, there are specific elements that might be easily improved, hopefully through amendments, but I think that we need to understand that from the start this legislation does not in any way, shape, or form get us to the independence that we are looking for, get us to the basic minimal requirements that we're looking for.

5:10

The final point that I will make, Madam Speaker, is that as much as these guys have been really keen to talk about how they're doing monitoring in a really independent way at some point in the future, the final word is this. You can put 19 cameras on a train which is about to go off the rails, but if you don't fix the rails or change the track, you're still going to go off the rails. At this point all these guys are doing is that they're taking a long time setting up the cameras, and nothing is being done to change the direction of this train. I want to make sure that this is not being used as a mechanism to talk about simply the number of cameras for the next 10 years while we continue to let the train barrel to its destination, which, unfortunately, will not be on the tracks.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is in place. Are there any members who wish to speak on 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, we'll go to the next speaker. Are there any other speakers who wish to speak in second reading? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. As always, it's a privilege to rise to discuss any bill, and it's the same here with Bill 21, the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Amendment Act, 2013. It was a particular treat to actually just listen to that tale

of woe or description of what actually has happened in this province over the course of the last number of years.

In particular, I didn't get here till 2008, at roughly the same time as the hon. member, and I remember those times. I remember reading in the papers prior to getting here what was happening up at Fort Chipewyan: the increased cancer rates, the strange fish they were finding in the waters, the location downstream from the production of our oil sands. You know, I wasn't the best in science, but I was pretty good at deductive reasoning, and I could pretty much draw the map and sort of see: well, there's something happening here, and dollars to doughnuts it's all that heavy industry that's going on up there. In fact, other signs and symbols were occurring in the province. Other red flags were coming up that clearly indicated that something was happening here.

My recollection of hearing for the first time that all of our concerns on the opposition side were just ridiculous, that we were all just crying wolf, that there were no problems, and that everything was in hand was actually in estimates. It might have even been supplementary supply. We actually got to ask ministers questions.

The first time I heard the story of how the toxin levels in our rivers were perfectly fine and not affected by what our industry was doing up in the Athabasca and other natural, flowing waters was when I asked hon. Minister Morton. I think he might have been the Environment and SRD minister at that time. He told me point-blank that my concerns were ill founded. Didn't I know that the tar sands . . .

Some Hon. Members: Oil sands.

Mr. Hehr: My apologies. I apologize.

. . . were naturally flowing substances that had just been seeping into the streams forever and a day, that this was just happening, that the rivers and the streams up there had become so accustomed to it that this additional industry component would have no effect on what was going on, that the oil sands were just a natural seep in there, that everything had reacted that way over the centuries and that there was nothing wrong, that we were crying wolf, like I said earlier.

Again, I was also here when former Minister Renner would get up and answer those questions posed by I believe it was the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre and other opposition MLAs on a repeated basis and said with a straight face: "Our scientists have investigated this problem. There is no cause for concern. Everything is all right." Then, lo and behold, the report came out from Dr. Schindler which said: well, everything isn't all right; there are real concerns here.

The way the government portrayed itself, essentially playing the role of Nero and playing the fiddle while things in the environment up there were going to heck in a handbasket, is very concerning. If they didn't know, that's highly concerning, but they should have known, really, what was happening up there. Therein lies the problem.

Going back even further, I know there is much talk now and again about who believes in climate change, but some of you were here in this Legislature when this provincial government was one of the late converts to global warming and the fact that it was real. This government didn't get onboard until 2004, when after, you know, almost 30 years of climate science being out there and most national governments recognizing it, maybe not doing anything about it but at least recognizing it, this government switched its position on global warming and actually admitted that it is real.

We have a long history of not recognizing science, the effects of our industry on water streams, the effects of CO₂ in the

atmosphere and the like and the devastating effects. To be honest, we thought at one time that it was probably in our economic interests to ignore them. You know, although that doesn't absolve us from our responsibility to other issues like the environment and global warming, I think we saw it as: "Well, we just have to do this. It's the way Alberta is going to make money and the way Alberta is going to make money in the future. Taking this stuff seriously is just not in our bailiwick because it's going to be too hard, and it's going to impact the bottom line." I think that decision was made.

Possibly and maybe even probably because we paid such a lack of attention to the real and overriding concerns out there, we find ourselves in the conundrum we are in today, where the world community looks at us and says: "What have you done? What are you guys going to do?" Our record is silent as to being in the direction that it should have been. Our actions have not matched our rhetoric as to how seriously we are going to address these environmental concerns.

Because of this, we are now in a box. We have to act quickly. We have to react to this public pressure. I don't even know if we're reacting quickly enough. It almost appears as if we're making it up on the fly. We saw that with the 40/40 proposal on emissions. You know, all of a sudden Keystone XL is in jeopardy. "Well, jeepers, we've got to try and do something to make it look like we're doing something." Hey, I think it would be a decent strategy to implement and bring that in and move forward on it.

5:20

My worry is that this is all just sort of a reaction to the current pressures and not necessarily taking seriously not only what's in our economic interest but what is our global responsibility issue. Our global responsibility is to try and do better and have levels of enforcement, levels of scientific monitoring that actually give us a true picture of what is happening. If we don't have that true picture, well, heck, we can never try and do any better.

Although this bill, I guess, is a step, I think I would have liked to have seen more of an independent body that manages this, that has a whole clean-slate approach to the way we're doing things and monitoring not only CO₂ emissions but our emissions into lakes, rivers, streams, and the like. Although this is a first step, as the hon. member said beforehand, we've been in a series of first steps or a series of baby steps when, to make headway in this game, we should be taking large leaps, trying to rectify not only problems of the past but to give us a social licence to carry on in what we do. My hope is that this bill goes a long way in doing this. However, because we do not know the details – they're not laid out for us for, I guess, a full, clear, and wholesome debate about the good, the bad, and the ugly of what we're going to try and do – it falls short, for me, in giving me that comfort level that we are going to do better.

Now, I know the hon. minister of environment is here. She assures me that everything is going to be done to see that this program is up, running, and doing what we need to do, but I would have liked to have seen in this Legislature more of the details of what we're going to do.

Nevertheless, Madam Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to discuss this matter. I appreciate the detailed way the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona went through the history. It gave me a chance to revisit some of those times over the last five years when I've almost fallen out of my chair at some of the answers that were given by the former minister of environment in regard to what was happening and the like. I'm hopeful for a better future. Take care.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a).

Seeing none, are there any other members who wish to speak in second reading on Bill 21?

Hon. Members: Question.

The Acting Speaker: The question has been called, but I'll ask the hon. Member for Calgary-North West to close debate.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I wish to thank all the members for participating in this debate and for their comments. We are certainly looking forward to continuing the debate in Committee of the Whole. I call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 21 read a second time]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole (continued)

[Mrs. Jablonski in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: I'd like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 17 Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2013

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Rowe: Thank you, Madam Chair. I have an amendment with the requisite number of copies that I will hand to the Clerk.

The Deputy Chair: Yes. We'll pause while we distribute those copies.

Hon. members, this will be known as amendment A1. The Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills may continue.

Mr. Rowe: Thank you again, Madam Chair. I will be very brief. This is the only amendment that I will be putting forward. What it would do is amend section 130(1)(b) to add the stipulation that the minister must hold a vote of the electors of the municipality on the proposed dissolution within 60 days after completing the viability review.

This would ensure that after a viability review is completed, a vote by the electors in the municipality would take place in a timely fashion. We all know government can move very slowly, and I think it is important to ensure that after a viability study is conducted and completed, a vote be held on the proposed dissolution within a reasonable time frame so that it is not delayed indefinitely. Sixty days, or two months, is adequate time for municipal officials and those residing in the municipality to thoroughly study the findings of the viability review.

Bill 17 will give the minister the ability to order a viability review for a municipality, and the same criteria that were in place for triggering a dissolution study will remain in place to trigger a viability review. A municipal council will still be able to request a viability review, or the people of the municipality can request a viability review with a petition from 30 per cent of the population of a municipality or the majority of electors in a summer village.

Most recent examples of municipalities undergoing a dissolution study, including one in my riding of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, were triggered because people within the municipality put forward a petition for dissolution. When it is the people in the

municipality asking for dissolution, it is important that they are able to cast their vote on the proposed dissolution in a timely manner after the viability review is completed.

Amending Bill 17 to ensure that a vote on a dissolution proposal must be held within 60 days after the completion of a viability review strikes the right balance between giving people in the municipality enough time to look at the findings of the viability review and ensuring that they are able to cast their vote on the dissolution proposal soon after the viability review is completed.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members who wish to speak? The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

5:30

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise in favour of this amendment. Hopefully, even the minister himself will support this amendment. What this amendment does is something very, very simple. It says that once that viability study is complete, there can be some sort of closure to this issue. The closure is that there has to be a vote under the act. It just makes sure that that doesn't get dragged out too long. For the citizens that would have brought the concerns forward, everything follows in place as the act requires. It just allows the citizens to know once the study is done and is complete that when the minister makes the announcement, there will be a vote, and they can count on the fact that it's going to be within so many days. If the minister would like a friendly amendment to extend it to 90 days or 120 days, I don't think there would be any opposition over here.

The reason the amendment was brought forward is so that there'd be some sort of assurance of closure and that something would not just get arbitrarily hung up in administration and not be resolved. I think it's a reasonable amendment. I would hope that the minister himself will accept it, and I encourage my colleagues to support it.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Are there any other members who wish to speak on amendment A1? The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Hale: Yes. Thank you, Madam Chair. I'd just like to rise and speak in favour of this amendment. The hon. Municipal Affairs minister knows of an issue kind of like this in my constituency. It's the village of Tilley, who had over 80 per cent of the residents sign a petition. They want to go through dissolution. The county wants to take them. I believe they are going through the viability review at this time.

You know, this would give them a little bit of a time frame so that they know. They're concerned that these studies won't be done and the voting and everything won't be done before the municipal elections come this fall. That's one of their concerns. I think this would allow them to put some of those concerns at ease. For other communities that are going through the same process, it would allow them a little bit of planning. They'll be able to plan a little bit better and put some of their concerns at ease.

I would hope that the hon. minister would take this into account. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you very much.

The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Ms Kubinec: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Unfortunately, I have to speak against the amendment as this went through a very

consultative process with AAMD and C and AUMA. I think that by putting that restriction on it, it's taking away some flexibility. We talk about being a government who wants to consult with our citizens, and that's exactly what we did in this process.

As well intentioned as it is, I cannot support it, and I would urge my colleagues not to as well.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members who wish to speak?

Mr. Griffiths: Well, Madam Chairman, first, I would just say a sincere, heartfelt thank you to the Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock for doing an exceptional job of carrying this piece of legislation. It's her first piece of legislation, and I am quite sure that it will not be her last. She will do a lot more good work in this House.

I didn't have the benefit, nor did any of my other colleagues, of seeing this proposed amendment before. It was just introduced. My colleague, who had already addressed the concern that these amendments were written to move from a dissolution process to a viability review process to be more active in engaging with municipalities, meant that we worked on this for three years. There have been extensive consultations with AUMA and AAMD and C and other municipalities to make sure that we had a process in place that was just. From all of that consultation I do understand exactly what the members are talking about because we have heard municipalities talk about timeliness and the process and making sure that they could get some of these challenges resolved quickly.

Madam Chairman, in this particular circumstance section 130.1 gives an option for the minister. It says:

After completing a viability review, the Minister may

- (a) by order direct the council or the chief administrative officer to take any actions, based on the results of the viability review, that the Minister considers appropriate to ensure the viability of the municipality, or
- (b) hold a vote of the electors.

This amendment, Madam Chairman, proposes to amend 130.1(b). Now, that still leaves the minister the option of providing orders to the municipality on what they need to do to make sure that they become more viable or actions that they need to take to make sure that they're successful. Putting a timeline around this, whether it's 90 days or 100 days, gives the impression that a vote will be conducted. But when you read this, the minister still has the option of (a) or (b), and there may be no vote at all. It gives a false impression that there will be directives around a vote in a timeline prescribed under 130.1(b) even though the minister has the option of pursuing 130.1(a) in directing the municipality to take a particular action.

Madam Chairman, I think this amendment isn't appropriate the way it's written, and I'd encourage my colleagues to reject it.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Madam Chair. The whole idea was not to take that flexibility away from the minister. I would just disagree with the hon. member. It doesn't give any type of false impression because it is still an option for the minister to administer and to call that vote. When the minister decides that that's the route you've chosen – that's your ability to do that – then once you make that decision, the vote takes places within so many days. That's where this amendment comes from. It maintains the

flexibility of the ministry to make other changes necessary to have all of that flexibility that's already built into the act.

All that this was intended to do – I think it's very clear – is that when the decision is made to conduct a vote, there is a time frame. I think that's reasonable. If you look at the act, particularly dealing with municipalities, under a couple of different provisions now the municipality, in dealing with things like petitions, with issues of some sort of referendum – the municipality has time frames for conducting a vote, I believe, on petitions. I think it's 60 days. I'll stand corrected. I'm going by memory. That vote falls within a certain time frame. So if a question is brought in front of a municipality, the council has the ability to say that if it's within one year of a scheduled vote, then they can delay that question until the regular election date. So it gives the municipalities the flexibility to not have multiple elections in any given year.

There are multiple provisions in the act now, which, hopefully, will be either strengthened or maintained when these issues are brought forward. I would just argue that this section does only one thing. It stays consistent with the rest of the act by providing a time frame when the ministry calls the vote. Only when that decision is made does this come into effect. That's why I said that whether it was 90 days or 120 days, I think you'd find acceptance on this side. We just wanted some sort of clarity that once it was determined that it was going to a vote, the public had some sort of time frame to expect that vote to happen.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Well, now I would argue that all of the arguments made by the hon. member make this amendment completely irrelevant, then, because if it still gives flexibility to the minister – and I know what he's referring to. In the MGA after councillors resign, they have to have a by-election within six months unless the minister gives permission that they can advance that longer so that if there is a municipal election nine months away, they don't have two elections in short succession. That gives the minister flexibility.

If the intent here, then, is to still give the minister flexibility so that once it's determined there's going to be a vote – the minister could simply sit for six months and wait until he decides on whether or not there's going to be a vote, so it still doesn't take the authority away from the minister to make that sort of decision. In fact, the way it's written now still allows for a timely vote if necessary, but it still allows the minister the opportunity to decide if it coincides too much with a general provincial election or a general municipal election.

There are other challenges as we have some municipalities where we've had one or two or three councillors resign. It still allows the minister the choice. This serves absolutely no purpose because it doesn't take it away; it doesn't give any sort of clarity or succinctness. It is still allowed, but it is at the minister's discretion, so I'd say this amendment becomes completely irrelevant.

5:40

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any others wishing to comment on amendment A1?

We'll call the vote.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We are back to discussing Bill 17 in Committee of the Whole. Are there any others who wish to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. It's my first time speaking to this bill. I appreciate the difficulty of what is facing the minister in regard to at least my perception of what he is facing out there and the challenges that are present in both our urban and our rural communities and how the whole group is getting along, where the Municipal Government Act regulates things, and how, in my view, the urbanization of this province is affecting the different mechanisms that have been in place and have served our province for the last 50 years.

There is no doubt that if you look at the local Calgary situation, you hear arguments over water and development size. You hear the comments from the mayor and other city councillors here in Edmonton, who feel that they are not getting a fair deal and that some, if reading between the lines, mergers and acquisitions should happen in our urban landscape to more adequately reflect the fact that Alberta is largely an urban province now. That doesn't mean that I don't understand that our rural communities continue to have people in them, that they continue to be valued Albertans, and they continue to provide much grit and muscle to the Alberta economy.

There is a sense out there amongst municipal councillors and, I know for a fact, some other people out there that the system right now is not working. You see that where you have a smaller town that may have a large industrial base. They're awash in cash while a community two steps down has a population base but no resources because of the way our system has been set up. Or you have big-city mayors who recognize that 50 per cent of the tax dollars their citizens send to the provincial coffers don't necessarily go back to them. They support other province-building activities that have traditionally been pursued in this province. It's difficult to continue those ways when you become a more urban province and when you even have people from rural communities who are using most of the services in our urban centres and the like.

Needless to say, this is a very difficult exercise that the minister is undertaking, one that will no doubt be challenging and full of land mines and not that easy to do. But the exercise is a little bit in public relations, changing some of the language, from dissolution and other words, to more favourable language which is trying to portray the government as a partner in assisting – assisting – with communities' problems and not necessarily being the bad guy. I understand that. That's how politics works and the like, but there is a lot that needs to be done. Hopefully, this bill will allow us to move to a recognition that the current system is not working for many municipalities in this great province and, in my view, has needed revamping for a long time.

On this note, because the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre is not here and she has tasked me with making her amendment here this afternoon, I will try to do it justice. You know, if I forgot to make this amendment here today, you could imagine what my time would be like at the caucus meeting tomorrow, Madam Chair. So with no further ado let me get this on the record. Here we go. This is on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Centre. If we could just pass that out.

The Deputy Chair: We'll pause for a moment while we pass out an amendment to Bill 17. This will be known as amendment A2.

Mr. Hehr: In this motion you can see that the Member for Edmonton-Centre is highly concerned that the minister will have, seemingly, the powers to dismiss an elected council. I guess from the position of the Member for Edmonton-Centre she sees this as

highly difficult, that the minister can just disband elected officials. Now, I guess we all know here that when you're dealing with matters of dissolution and whether people are going to go into another electoral zone or become a different name or entity, this becomes somewhat problematic. How much power can the minister have? How much can the town councils have?

I guess maybe a pragmatic solution is that once everything is agreed to, we can wait till, you know, the next election cycle. Whatever is proposed can happen the next election cycle so that those town councillors who are elected continue to serve their areas for the full term of their elected session prior to any dissolution or amalgamation occurring. That would be one idea. I am certain that there are others, which the Member for Edmonton-Centre will explain when she discusses this at a later time in this House.

That's essentially it. We think it's heavy handed and unwarranted in this regard. I'd urge members to support this amendment on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Centre.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members who would like to speak on amendment A2? The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Ms Kubinec: Thank you, Madam Chair. Unfortunately, again I have to speak against this amendment, and I'm using the same rationale as the last one. This went through a very thorough consultative process with the people involved, and this is what the people want to see happen. Just as a side note, the minister already has the power to do that.

I would urge my colleagues to vote against this amendment.

5:50

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members who wish to speak on amendment A2?

Hon. Members: Question.

The Deputy Chair: The question has been called.

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We are back to discussion on Bill 17 in committee.

Mr. Hehr: No. I think that's fine. I've done my good service on behalf of the Alberta Liberal caucus and the Alberta people. I wish the minister luck with getting some of his ideas through.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'd move that the committee rise and report progress and beg leave to sit again.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

[Motion carried]

[Mrs. Jablonski in the chair]

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

Ms Kennedy-Glans: I am happy to do that, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills and reports progress on Bill 17. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Mr. Hancock: Madam Speaker, I'd move that we adjourn until 7:30 p.m.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:53 p.m.]

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