

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Tuesday, April 3, 2007

1:00 p.m.

Date: 07/04/03

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Give to each member of this Legislature a strong and abiding sense of the great responsibility laid upon us. Give us a deep and thorough understanding of the needs of the people we serve. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

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

Mr. Zwodzesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure for me to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 53-plus great rising stars of our education system from Blessed Kateri school. They are accompanied today by teachers Mr. Ray Brooks, Mrs. Darlene Payne, Mrs. Krista MacGregor and, I'm pleased to add, by two student teachers as well, Mrs. Karon Dragon and Miss Gina Lowther. I would ask all of them to please rise and receive the warm applause of the Assembly. Thank you for coming.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am so honoured to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a wonderful group of young citizens who are joining us today from the Nellie McClung program at Oliver school. These are the BLAST team members that just held a rally outside hoping to convince the government to ban power walls. The students that are with us today are Eyerusalem Ghebremusse, Marissa Giroux, Shanice Morris, Jolene Paul, Shelby Fowler, Jessica Deschambeau, Janessa Hidber, Crystin Kilmarnock, Samantha Vaillancourt, Vivian Poon, Jule Silver, Taryn Pohl, Kat Fuller, Haylee Fortin, Alex Hyska, Amanda Annett, and Taylor Pinch, and they are joined by their teacher, Mrs. Heather Jubenvill, who has led them all this way. I would ask them all to please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly Brian Clelland and Rory Marusiak. Brian and Rory are members of UFCW local 401 and are on strike at the Palace Casino here in Edmonton. They've now been on strike for 207 days due in part to this government's unfair labour legislation. Brian has been working at the Palace Casino as a dealer for a year and a half. Prior to working at the casino, he worked full time at Canada Post and was a member of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers for 18 years. Rory Marusiak has been at the Palace Casino for five years and also works as a dealer. Rory is a dedicated trade unionist and advocate for all workers within the gaming industry. He has played a key role throughout negotiations as an advisory committee member. They are seated in the public gallery, and I would now ask that they rise and receive the warm, traditional welcome of this Assembly.

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Shalini Puri. Shalini is a social work student at Grant MacEwan College and is doing her placement in my constituency office. She joined us in September and has been extremely dedicated and has demonstrated a high level of competence in handling casework and in assisting the people of Edmonton-Strathcona. Shalini received her bachelor of arts in sociology from the University of Alberta with a minor in anthropology. She's very active in the community and has helped develop a nonprofit youth organization called Jagriti, which roughly translated from Hindi into English means awakening. She's also an organizer for a biannual community-based conference on seniors' health issues called Matters of the Heart. Shalini is sitting in the public gallery. I would now ask her to please stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: **Members' Statements**

The Speaker: Hon. members, we have six members who will participate today.

Just an alert to all hon. members of the Assembly: on Thursday of this week we will acknowledge and remember Vimy Ridge and that historic event in the history of Canada, so perhaps members who would be wanting to participate in Members' Statements might wish to use that as the theme of their statement on Thursday of this week.

The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Primary Health Care Renewal Initiatives

Mr. Coutts: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak about primary health care here in Alberta. We are always seeking ways to improve patient care, producing better health outcomes faster and with lower costs. In my constituency of Livingstone-Macleod a group of health care professionals under the leadership of Dr. John Rottger from the Associate clinic have been able to do exactly that through a program called the good health initiative. This program changed the way some kinds of health care were offered, including chronic disease management, mental health wellness services, health promotion and screening, and surgical services. A good health team composed of a nurse, a registered social worker, a pharmacist, and a dietitian have been able to better educate patients to dramatically reduce hospital admission rates and doctor visits.

By combining a medical clinic under the same roof with home care, public health, and mental health services, patient convenience and communication have also been improved. By collaborating with community partners, the good health team, as it is called, is also carrying out a promotional campaign to draw attention to screening for a number of preventable health conditions. This same group of professionals is now working on a project called advanced access, that has managed to reduce wait times significantly.

I commend this group of health care professionals in Pincher Creek for their efforts, and I hope that all members of this House and all regional health authorities will look to their example as the kind of innovation the Alberta health care system needs at this time.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Camrose Wild Rose Sports Arena

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This fall Camrose will open a new sport development centre, a major project of the city and

county of Camrose, the University of Alberta, and the province of Alberta. This past Sunday was a special occasion for the community to gather at the old arena, the Wild Rose, to say goodbye. The Wild Rose is the oldest operating arena in the province and the third oldest in Canada, having been built 81 years ago. Sunday marked the end of its fascinating history of service to sport in this community and in this province.

A figure skater and a hockey player are painted on the south wall of the arena, symbolizing the activities of 81 years. They represent athletes and teams who grew and excelled in their sports; the exhilaration of victory and the disappointment of defeat; the strain of injury and the patience of healing; the coaching, mentorship, and encouragement of parents and teammates; the value of respect for opponents and teammates; the dedication of the icemakers, the caretakers, the scorekeepers, and all the volunteers; the appreciation of the fans who cheered these athletes on to greater heights of success; and those who just skated for the fun of it.

At Sunday's event the community gathered one last time to see their favourite Camrose Maroons hockey team of years gone by gather as alumni to play the younger Augustana Vikings, who also played a role in the history of this arena. In the intermission the Rusty Blades precision figure skaters team performed to perfection to a large, nostalgic crowd. At the conclusion Stu Bailey, who was born shortly after the arena was built and now still plays hockey for the old old-timers, a hero of the Maroons era, skated one more time around the ice to end a glorious 81 years of sport at the old rink in Camrose.

To all involved in sport history through the Wild Rose Arena, I say: thank you, and may the great memories and friendships last forever.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

1:10

Bessie Roffey

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. High Prairie, Alberta, has a great distinction that no other community has; that is, being home to Alberta's oldest and wisest person. To quote the *Spotlight* paper of March 14: it took all her breath, but Bessie Roffey, Alberta's oldest person, managed to blow out two of the three candles on her cake. That's pretty good. The supercentenarian celebrated her 110th birthday on March 2, 2007.

Born in London, England, on March 2, Bessie lost her father in 1904 at a very young age. Her mother put her two brothers in grammar school in England while she took Bessie on a journey in 1906. They travelled across the Atlantic Ocean in what she says in those days weren't the big ships they are now; they were just tubs. They survived those tubs and made it all the way to Quebec.

Both Bessie and her mom began their new life from there and subsequently moved all around North America. Although she mostly grew up in Fort Macleod, she also lived in such places as Fernie, Lloydminster, Florida, Sunnyside, and finally settled in Kinuso, where she met and married her husband, Bill Roffey.

Mr. Speaker, when asked what her secret to a long life is, she giggles with a twinkle in her eye and says: the good Lord doesn't want me, and the devil won't take me, so I am still here.

Mr. Speaker, Mrs. Roffey, as you can tell, is still lucid, recognizes people, and sure can tell you off when you need it. I've received a few of her barbs.

I'd ask my colleagues to join me in congratulating Alberta's oldest resident, who I fondly call Queen Roffey.

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

School Closures

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the movie *Fahrenheit 451* a fire brigade torches a pile of books, and a boy asks: Daddy, is it true that firemen used to put out fires? As neighbourhood schools continue to close, I imagine a child asking: did all schools used to be community schools? The answer to both questions is yes.

As the west was settled, each town and village had three structures: the grain elevator, schoolhouse, and church, food for the body, mind, and soul. There was a choice of grain companies and religious denominations. Schoolhouses were common to all, the original community centres. Work bees, public meetings, dances, and parties took place there, and the local school board sponsored or approved them. To talk of community schools would have been redundant.

Though Alberta provided separate education for Roman Catholic students, our forebears recognized that these, too, were public schools, publicly funded and intended for all who chose to send their children and direct their taxes there.

Then came busing. Schools became plants and facilities, factories for delivery of educational products and services. Nonproductive lines were discontinued, underutilized outlets closed.

In the 1970s Alberta Education designated community schools to be specially funded and maintained to serve their communities. Then idealism died and bottom-line thinking took over. Government cut funding and stripped school boards of the power to raise their own revenues. Now every year families wait to see if the neighbourhood school will be on the chopping block.

With our province in the flux of rapid growth we need neighbourhood schools more than ever and not just in the boom communities. If building strong communities is a priority, then let us understand that schools are cornerstones of strong communities. I suggest that we can bring these together without sacrificing fiscal responsibility if we choose to.

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

Trade, Investment, Labour, and Mobility Agreement

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday in question period the Premier said that the government has "met with all those individuals, authorities, organizations that have anything to do with respect to the agreement," talking about TILMA. But the fact is that this government is only now planning to consult Albertans, when the agreement has already come into force and our hands are tied by it, and we can prove it. For starters, we know that the government put a request for proposals to do the TILMA consultation on the Alberta Purchasing Connection on March 26, 2007. The deadline for proposals was yesterday at 12:30 p.m., about an hour before the Premier assured us that everyone had been consulted.

Then, Mr. Speaker, there's this notice from the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association to their members. The headline is AUMA Wants Full Consultation on New Alberta-B.C. Trade Agreement. Clearly, they don't think that they've been consulted. The notice goes on to say that they asked "last year that municipalities be consulted on any initiative to implement TILMA." The municipalities haven't been consulted. They were told to wait for the consultation, which will occur sometime this spring, well after the agreement has come into force.

This agreement will affect all Albertans, not just businesses. Farmers, school trustees, nurses, health regions, and municipalities will all be affected by this agreement. All these individuals and

organizations deserved to be consulted before this government signed this agreement. The Premier has promised to govern with integrity and transparency. The way TILMA is brought in shows a total lack of integrity and transparency.

Curling Events in Lethbridge

Mr. Dunford: Well, now for something completely different. Mr. Speaker, I know that you appreciate this, but I'm not sure everybody in the room appreciates just the hotbed of curling that Lethbridge happens to be in. Let me give some examples. In February we hosted the Scottie Tournament of Hearts, and I want to say congratulations to Jody Meli and all of those volunteers. According to all of the feedback that we have received, it was a very, very great event, and people just fell in love with Lethbridge.

Let me secondly, then, talk about the junior world championships, and of course the team from Alberta were the winners. The skip, I believe, was originally from Grande Prairie, but the third, Brock Virtue, is Lethbridge born and raised, a Lethbridgite. We're very, very proud of him. We know that his dad, George, is. A personal friend of mine, his grandfather, Charlie Virtue, unfortunately is no longer with us, but Charlie will be watching somewhere and, I'm sure, will be very, very proud of his grandson.

Now, the third one is that in the senior women's Canadian championships a team skipped by a woman from Calgary had three Lethbridge curlers on it, and I want to mention their names. There were Chris Wilson, Shirley Kohuch, and Shirley McPherson. Now, they've won this tournament. They will represent Canada at the world's in 2008. We don't know what the site is yet, but knowing Chris Wilson as well as I do, given the choice I'm sure it will be Provence or Tuscany.

So, ladies and gentlemen, that wild, windy, warm Lethbridge hotbed of curling.

head: Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

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

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In accordance with Standing Order 99 the Standing Committee on Private Bills has reviewed the petitions that I presented on Monday, April 2, 2007, and I can advise the House that the petitions are not in compliance with Standing Orders 90 to 94.

The committee has considered the petitions and recommends to the Assembly that Standing Order 94(1)(b) be waived for the petition of the CyberPol – The Global Centre for Securing Cyberspace Act, and for the petition of the CREST Leadership Centre Act, subject to the petitioners providing proof of advertising in accordance with the Standing Orders before the committee hears the petitioners.

Mr. Speaker, this is my report.

The Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Speaker: Opposed? Carried.

head: Presenting Petitions

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising to present a petition from a group of Albertans petitioning the Legislative Assembly to

“urge the Government of Alberta to hold rent increases to no more than the rise in the average monthly wage until December 31, 2010,” all gathered at one tanning establishment in my riding.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have 1,062 signatures that read:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government to add the drug Elaprase to the Drug Benefit List approved by Alberta Health and Wellness in order to ensure that those suffering from Hunter's Syndrome, including Jordan Miranda, Riley Miranda and Tyler Chauhan, get the care they need to reduce their suffering and live full lives.

head: 1:20 Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Bill 23 Unclaimed Personal Property and Vested Property Act

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 23, the Unclaimed Personal Property and Vested Property Act. This being a money bill, His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, the purpose of this bill is to establish a primary repository and claims system for the unclaimed or abandoned personal property of Albertans consistent with the recommendations of the Uniform Law Conference of Canada. It will also establish a clear process for managing and resolving issues relating to property that vests in the Crown when a corporation is dissolved.

Thank you very much.

[Motion carried; Bill 23 read a first time]

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to table six copies of the Choosing Child Care booklet, which is a guide to licensed and approved child care in Alberta. This helpful tool was designed by Children's Services to provide parents with the information they need to make an informed decision about the different child care options available in Alberta. This booklet also provides parents with a telephone interview planner and a checklist they can use to determine which type of program is best suited for their child's needs.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a tabling from my constituents Gordon and Karin Daniher. They are concerned about shortages of beds, long waiting times for detox. Thousands of people and their families are paying a horrific price, and they are urging this government to act fast, before it's too late.

Thank you.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is from constituent Jennifer Semeniuk, who is raising the issue of rent controls. She feels that she's "an educated overworked individual who is sadly one paycheck away from being homeless." She is "disappointed in this government for not taking care of its 'average' persons and [holding] out for big business instead."

The second is from constituent Paola Guasp, who is writing with her concerns about the teachers' unfunded liability. She feels that the cost of the current generation of retirees is being passed on to a generation of teachers not yet born, and she would like to see this situation resolved.

Thank you.

Mrs. Mather: Mr. Speaker, I have two tablings. The first is from Jean Luke, called foster care, in need of care. She's talking about the stigma attached to foster care. "Losing children to care or a breakdown of a family can happen to the best of us . . . We need to provide this child with a family that not only cares for them but cares about them."

My other tabling is from Debbie Goeseels asking for support for child care that is safe and affordable. She's concerned about the lack of options available for both daycare and out-of-school care.

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and table two groups of documents. One is the annual report and strategic plan from the Institute of Human Development, Child and Youth Health plus supporting documents. I recently spoke at their conference.

Also, the second group is a hundred letters from good Albertans petitioning our Alberta Legislature to support that the accused killer of Joshua Hunt be sentenced and tried "as an adult due to the nature of [his] crime, his past criminal history and that he is so close to the age of 18 years."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: It was the hon. leader of the third party.

Dr. Taft: Oh, the third party. [interjections]

Mr. Mason: I love these moments, Mr. Speaker. [interjections] Patience, please.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to table copies of 10 different letters that my office has recently received. The signatories to these letters are all urging the government to provide funding for the cancer-fighting drug Avastin. A constituent of mine, Dr. Jerrard, and his family pay \$1,750 every two weeks for Avastin treatment. The drug is already covered by the cancer boards in B.C., Quebec, and Newfoundland. The following individuals have sent letters: Sandi Halliwell, Rod Layton, Omari Lewis, Sue Williams, Brooke Rothwell, Bob Lowry, Gerry Hunt, Colleen McLeod, Linette Smith, and Hans Van Ginhoven.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table copies of e-mails from two very concerned Calgary citizens, Laurie Fuhr and

Alexander Kurth. On April 1 a temporary homeless shelter in Calgary was closed. Unfortunately, as we know, the temperatures in Calgary remain sub zero, leaving Calgary's homeless in a very dangerous position. Laurie and Alexander are urging the city and the province to consider the situation a state of emergency and to immediately provide a temporary shelter.

Thank you.

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

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to rise and table the following seven letters and the appropriate copies from Albertans concerned about the cancer drug Avastin's ineligibility for coverage by the Alberta Cancer Board. Letters were written by Norm Dyer, Cathy Thornell, Laura E. Lewis, Bob Lowry, Pat Stevenson, Maggie Bullen, and Doug Frend.

Thank you.

head:

Oral Question Period

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

Sterilization Equipment for Hospitals

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week this government spent \$200,000 sending out a brochure listing its five priorities. They are painfully obvious, things like "improve Albertans' quality of life" – well, yeah – "build a stronger Alberta," and "provide safe and secure communities." As if anybody wants otherwise. My question is to the Premier. Which of his government's five priorities covers buying adequate sterilization equipment for Alberta's hospitals?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, all five priorities are important to Albertans. This is really part and parcel of what I heard on the campaign trail for the leadership. Given the kind of support that I've been receiving in terms of visiting communities, again members of communities, Albertans, reiterating those priorities, showing support for them, I know that in partnership with Albertans these are the priorities this government supports and Albertans as well.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. The Premier is getting pretty predictable in dodging the questions. I'm sure, for example, that the people of Claresholm would like a better answer. Last weekend the people of Claresholm had to hold a fundraiser to get donations – donations – to buy something as important to their hospital as equipment to sterilize medical equipment. Probably the people of Vegreville would like a better answer too and the people of Canmore and of Didsbury and of who knows where else. To the Premier. Will the Premier tell us which is a bigger priority for his government: medical sterilization equipment or \$200,000 worth of meaningless brochures?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the confidence of Albertans in the public health system is very important to this government, and we will do whatever we can to restore that confidence in the health system, to ensure that we learn from what has happened in the community of Vegreville. But the \$200,000 that the member is talking about is 20 cents per household. That's less than half the price of a stamp, and it got to households right across this province, so over a million households. So it's one way of communicating with Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It would cost about 3 cents a household to put in adequate sterilization equipment in hospitals. The old sterilization machine at the Claresholm hospital had broken down and was beyond repair. It had been out of service for over a month. A new one costs \$30,000, a tiny fraction of the cost of the Premier's mail-out. In an age of antibiotic-resistant bacteria sterilization equipment is not an option. To the Premier: will the Premier cancel subsequent propaganda mail-outs and put that money toward essential sterilization equipment in hospitals instead?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the hon. leader is not giving us the correct information with respect to Claresholm. I'll have the minister of health respond.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It boggles the imagination that the hon. member would want to confuse and scare Albertans in that fashion. What happened at Claresholm was a business decision made by the regional health authority to regionalize their sterilization at the High River hospital. There was never any danger to anybody there. It was an operational decision appropriately made by the board. What the board has said to the foundation and to Claresholm is that if they would like to have sterilization, that's a nice to have but not a need to have, and if they want to raise the money for it, they will operate it. But sterilization equipment is operating in High River.

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

1:30 Monitoring of Health Delivery

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the minister of health: sterilization equipment is a need to have.

A letter from the United Nurses of Alberta to the East Central health region raises serious concerns that residents lack confidence in the health care system and are afraid to use local health facilities. Leadership is about communications, and this Premier is failing to communicate. If residents with chest pains are too afraid of infection to go to the hospital, it is the Premier's responsibility to provide the community with the facts they need. The Premier claims that residents in this community aren't concerned. To the Premier: has the Premier considered the possibility that Albertans don't actually want this issue swept under the rug?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, actually, opposition scaremongering in this province undermines public confidence in the health system.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, leadership is about accountability. The Premier is failing to be accountable, as he demonstrates every day here. The Premier's only response about the government's role in providing infection control in the public health care system is "All we have to say: please wash your hands." Well, will the Premier be accountable to the residents of East Central health region and his own community and commit to holding a public information meeting where all the facts can be laid on the table?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, yesterday I said that this is a medical issue, not a political issue. Quite frankly, I feel for the many thousands of health professionals in this province, professionals that work in the public health system, and this kind of continued attack by the opposition really undermines their confidence.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Leadership is about good management, and as we see, this Premier is failing to provide good management. Albertans are in this situation because of cuts to the health system spearheaded by this Premier as part of the Deep Six. These cuts included eliminating the government's own hospital monitoring and enforcement branch. The Premier refuses – refuses – to take responsibility for creating this mess. When it comes to protecting public health, the honour system is not good enough. Will the Premier restore the hospital monitoring and enforcement branch to the department of health?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition must be getting the questions from the third party. I think that's why he got mixed up earlier today in terms of who you called. This question was asked by the third-party opposition last week. I said that we're going to listen to the advice given to our minister by the Health Quality Council. We'll listen to their recommendations, and whatever follow-up they recommend, we will do.

Provincial Labour Supply

Dr. B. Miller: Alberta will reportedly face a shortfall of over 100,000 workers within the next 10 years, and by 2025 that number could grow to 330,000. It is clear that Alberta must catch up or get left behind. Now, Manitoba's provincial nominee program brought about 6,600 skilled immigrants into that province last year whereas Alberta's program brought in only 546. We could have a stronger program. My question is to the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry. Could she tell us why this government failed to make better use of the provincial nominee program in previous years?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to get a question about the provincial nominee program because we have been accelerating our efforts over this past year, and we will deliver more provincial nominees in the program this coming year. We will continue to work with the federal government on the temporary foreign worker program. The bottom line is that we have been working very aggressively for the past two years under our previous Premier's leadership, under previous ministers, to aggressively put together a made-in-Alberta solution that takes advantage of the federal government's supports in assessing public security but assures that we select the right worker for the right place and the right job at the right time. A great part of this is contingent on working with our partners at the university and college level.

In the case of Manitoba, Mr. Speaker, they aggressively were pursuing targeting provincial nominee candidates from the colleges and universities so that, in actual fact, if a college or university had not written in an agreement to keep that student for the benefit of the community that they came from, they could . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. According to statistics provided by the Department of Employment, Immigration and

Industry, only 48 per cent of Alberta's recent immigrants were able to find a job in their intended occupation. More than half do not find a job in their intended occupation. That's not good enough. What is the department doing to overcome barriers such as finding Canadian work experience and, more importantly, the transferring of foreign credentials?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, I completely agree with the member opposite that asked the question, that we haven't been doing as well as we are going to do. We have to do more because, in fact, we not only have immigrants that come to Alberta that need successful placements, but we have to unlock some of the barriers. The foreign credential program, a made-in-Alberta solution, will attempt to do that.

Further, Mr. Speaker, for the immigrants that come through other ports, like Vancouver, Montreal, and Toronto, we have to make sure that there are settlement programs that help benefit them even though currently that isn't a part of the federal funding for our made-in-Alberta strategy.

Dr. B. Miller: Mr. Speaker, between 25 and 30 per cent of immigrants coming to Alberta actually abandon this province after living here for a while, compared to only 10 per cent in B.C. No wonder, because when they come here, they can't find enough housing. There's no affordable housing. There are inadequate health services, child care. To the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry: will the minister admit that the failure to keep up with Alberta's growth in terms of services and infrastructure actually has a negative effect on our ability to address the labour shortages of Alberta?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, we cost share the programming for integrated settlement services with the federal government. It's my understanding that they intend to increase those supports this year.

Quite frankly, a lot of the issues relate to the lack of preparation by the candidate coming to Alberta, not getting proper knowledge in the first instance. We're working on both web page tutorials and other means to make sure that people know that they're not likely to get a job placement and not likely to get services if they don't know what they're coming to or what they need to be prepared for. We're working to increase our supports here, but we're also working to increase the supports of . . .

Health Care Funding

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, yesterday, even as the Premier and the health minister failed to take responsibility for not providing funding to Vegreville's St. Joseph's hospital, news was breaking of another hospital, this one in Claresholm, that has been asking for years to get funding in order to buy this essential equipment. This government's failure to take responsibility is being shifted to those who are not to blame. Alberta's nurses and other front-line workers are feeling the brunt of Albertans' anger because the government continually avoids taking responsibility for this mess. To the Premier: why is the government refusing to take responsibility for the health of Albertans in respect of hospitals and the sterilization procedures in those hospitals? Why are you letting the nurses take the blame?

Mr. Stelmach: Actually, Mr. Speaker, in an earlier question I supported all of the dedicated health professionals in terms of this unwarranted attack on health professionals in this province. When it comes to responsibility, I said that whatever recommendations come forward from the review in Vegreville and from working with

all health professionals in terms of how we can further improve the system, the minister of health will bring those recommendations forward to our caucus. If it requires legislation or whatever is required we will do in order to ensure that similar situations don't happen again in the province.

Mr. Mason: The Premier seems to believe that words in this Assembly are going to comfort the health care professionals who day after day after day have to put up with poor working conditions, antiquated equipment, huge waiting lines, patients that don't get seen in emergency rooms. When will this Premier commit to taking responsibility for improving our health care system and improving the lot not just of the people who need to use the health care system but the people who have to go to work every day in that system?

1:40

Mr. Stelmach: You know, Mr. Speaker, as I was listening to the leader of the third party, I was thinking: how is it that listening to him absolutely sounds like this is the worst place in the world, yet our Capital regional health authority is consistently recognized as the best health authority in the world, right here in the city of Edmonton? You're a representative of Edmonton.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, once again this Premier thinks that words are enough. What Albertans need and what the health care system needs is real action. Can the Premier, then, tell us how often code burgundies occur in Calgary? If our health care system is as fine as he thinks it is, how long do people have to wait in emergency rooms in Edmonton or in his own constituency? Can the Premier stand up and tell us the facts rather than just say that everything is great?

Mr. Stelmach: Again, the hon. member is trying to put words into my mouth. I didn't say that it's all great, great, great. It requires improvement. We are spending the most per capita here in Alberta, yet we know we can improve the system by encouraging all health care providers to work together with government to reduce, of course, the waiting lines, to look at other ways of how we can create a much less, you know, bureaucratic system, to create seamless access to health in this province.

On the other comment I heard from that side in terms of Saskatchewan, the hon. member should actually ask the Premier – it might be your Premier from Saskatchewan because you're on the same side – to come here and ask how many patients actually access service here in Alberta.

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

Trade, Investment, and Labour Mobility Agreement

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. British Columbia, our partner in the trade, investment, and labour mobility agreement, or the TILMA, has already tabled legislation to implement this important agreement. My question is to the Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations. Can the minister tell us when Alberta will follow suit and table legislation?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In fact, yesterday a member in this House made a comment. The Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview indicated that there was "no consultation." That is simply not true. I quote here from the *Hansard*. He did make reference to the fact that no one was

consulted. I find it interesting that the Association of Registered Nurses, who they're very familiar with, Mary-Anne Robinson, said that this is a model that other governments should follow. So it's very obvious to me, the hundreds that we've consulted with. We will continue to be consulting with them.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister. The minister just pointed out that yesterday there were claims by members opposite that the TILMA is a secret deal and that Albertans have been left in the dark about it. We know that's not true, but I'd like the minister to explain if and when the government consulted with stakeholders about this agreement.

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, that's what we've been doing for the last three years. It just so happens that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview is not aware of that. But even more interesting: it's so secretive that all of Canada knows about it. We have Premiers calling our Premier about it. You know what I find interesting? The hon. member made reference to April Fool's Day, and you know what I say to that: if the shoe fits.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental is again to the Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations. Companies on the border already doing business in the other provinces say that the TILMA won't affect them, so what's the real benefit of this agreement, and how will it help businesses, say, in my constituency?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, thank you. I want to once again say that both our governments, in British Columbia and in this province, have always agreed that this will be in the Legislature, and that is what is happening. Consequently, as we move forward: 7.7 million Canadians from both our provinces as customers. The NDP may want to have higher prices for their voters. We don't for all of Albertans.

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

Community Initiatives Program

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The community initiatives program, CIP, application guideline states very clearly that if a group cannot raise matching funds up to \$10,000, it will be considered on a nonmatching basis. However, documents tabled in this Assembly show that this government is breaking its own rules. To the Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture: why has this government in three years awarded not one, not 10, not 20, but 43 nonmatching CIP grants over \$10,000, totalling over \$2 million? Why?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, with CIP we try as much as possible to provide equitable funding to all towns and all villages and rural areas, including the urban centres across Alberta. We recognize that at times there are

some organizations out there that are providing a great service that are having some financial difficulties. CIP has been built to respond to our volunteers to provide a one-time, nonmatchable funding of up to \$10,000 if the need is there, and that need comes across through our staff.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier, Minister of Finance, Minister of Health, Minister of Sustainable Resource Development all have secret donors to their leadership campaign. Can this minister assure this House that groups receiving this special treatment are not secret friends of top Tories?

The Speaker: We have a point of order that we'll deal with at the conclusion of the Routine.

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, I don't think the question is really worthy of a response. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister again: given that FOIP documents show that a frat house blew a CIP grant on high-end furniture, how can Albertans be confident that they are receiving value for these specialties? Why are you not accountable?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, all of our applicants have to be registered societies, and all of our applicants have to provide financial statements as to how and when they've spent their money. I need to identify the fact that there are probably hundreds if not thousands of CIP applications going through, so when the hon. member talks about 40 applicants receiving some support, they're an extremely small percentage of the total amount of groups and organizations that we support.

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

Métis Hunting Rights

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, the government of Alberta entered into interim harvesting agreements with the Métis Nation of Alberta and the Métis Settlements General Council in 2004. Those agreements were in response to a Supreme Court of Canada decision called Powley, and it gave the Métis a right to harvest food for subsistence. My question is for the Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations. What is the status of these agreements, and are there negotiations under way to replace them with long-term agreements?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutilier: Yes, Mr. Speaker. It's a very good question. Yes, the ultimate goal of this government, working with our stakeholders and all Albertans, is to in fact reach a long-term agreement. The Alberta government recognizes and respects the Métis right to harvest. The negotiations have been ongoing. We've made some very good progress since May of 2006. Now, I will say that negotiations have been working very closely with the principals of an MLA committee relative to protecting the interests of all Albertans and our important stakeholders. It is ongoing, and I'd like to say that we're making excellent progress and will continue to do

so in the spirit of good faith in working with these important Albertans.

Dr. Brown: To the same minister: can the minister advise the House what timelines have been put in place to ensure that these agreements do come to fruition?

1:50

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, in actual fact I'm meeting with Audrey Poitras, the president, and also Eldon Armstrong from the settlements. I want to say that we have an agreement, a 90-day timeline that has been established to negotiate a long-term agreement. The decision to set a timeline was based on, of course, the Alberta court ruling the hon. member has mentioned regarding the enforceability of the existing interim harvesting agreement. We are very optimistic. The expiry date is July 1. Working together and looking at our positive energy that we have had to date, we can protect the interests of all Albertans.

Dr. Brown: My further supplemental question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. In view of the imminent termination of the interim Métis harvesting agreement can the minister advise what the consequences are on the enforcement of your department's fish and game conservation laws?

Dr. Morton: The consequences are very good indeed, Mr. Speaker. It means the end of the current Métis harvesting agreement and the beginning of a new agreement, an agreement that strikes a better balance with protection of Alberta's fisheries and wildlife. Our caucus has said that the substance of the current agreement is not acceptable. The courts have said that the process used to create the current agreement is unacceptable. It's clear to all that this is a dog that cannot hunt and needs to be replaced, and that's what we'll have in 90 days: a new deal.

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

Foster Care Delivery

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The vast majority of Alberta's foster families are doing an incredible job, but occasionally there are exceptions. The shortage of foster families in this province means that sometimes children are being placed in homes that are not in the child's best interest. To the Minister of Children's Services: what background checks and monitoring practices are in place to make certain that children in foster homes are safe?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I can tell you that the safety of the children is our number one priority here. I know that last week we had a similar question. I had shared some of the same information. But I can tell you that what we do have is a very vigorous screening process, and that does include home studies. It includes reference checks, criminal record and child intervention checks as well as medical references. We also have face-to-face interviews. I also mentioned last week that we have guidelines to specify how many children are appropriate for the experience of the foster parent.

Mrs. Mather: To the Minister of Children's Services. Social workers are doing the best job they can with the resources they have, but a number of the workers I have spoken to are afraid to go public

about this issue for fear of repercussions. These are conscientious people who want to do the right thing. What protocols does the department have in place to ensure that workers who blow the whistle on unsafe practices will be protected?

Ms Tarchuk: Mr. Speaker, I guess what I would say there is that I also want to do the right thing. So if, in fact, this hon. member has some information that I should have or can encourage someone to come forward to me, I would appreciate that.

Mrs. Mather: This problem is largely due to the severe shortage of foster families that we face in Alberta. What is the minister doing now to ensure that Alberta has enough foster families to meet the needs of vulnerable children?

Ms Tarchuk: Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that we're always recruiting foster families, so those efforts never do stop. Just to point out something of interest, though, our ratio of foster children per foster parent is actually lower in this province than most other provinces in Canada. But that's not to take away from the fact that we are always looking for more foster families.

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

Holy Cross Care Centre

Mr. Shariff: Mr. Speaker, the Calgary health region has been moving residents out of the Holy Cross long-term care centre after learning that the building did not meet the fire and safety codes. Last week I heard from the family of a 90-year-old infirm lady who received a 48-hour notice to vacate the place and be transferred to a site that the family referred to as a dungeon. This stress had an adverse reaction about the health and well-being of an infirm lady. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. What type of communication strategy was used to communicate the transition plan with the residents in the long-term care centre program at the Holy Cross site?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. In early March the Calgary health region advised all residents and families that they would be moved as soon as a new facility could be found for them. The CHR's objective was to move residents as soon as possible to have all of them moved by the end of April. The region began working with families immediately, providing facility options and the opportunity to visit facilities so that they could make the best choice available for their loved ones. Families made decisions about their loved one's moves as soon as they viewed the facilities. Some families felt that they needed to see more options, and that request was respected. The goal was to move as many residents as possible to a facility of choice, and the region paid for moving residents' personal belongings. Some families chose to do this themselves and hired moving companies, but I'm assured by the region that everyone was given ample notice and no one was rushed into making a decision.

Mr. Shariff: My first supplemental is to the same minister. What assurances can the minister give this House that the move is being handled in a caring and compassionate manner?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, this is a very serious situation. I'm satisfied that the Calgary health authority has done everything

it can to do the move of these residents in an appropriate manner, to give them appropriate notice, to give them appropriate choice where possible, and to respect their decisions where possible, but they also wanted to make sure that the residents were moved on a timely basis. The goal was to move them by the end of April. In fact, the region moved the last two residents last Friday. But even prior to that, I want to make sure that Albertans know that the Calgary health region did the right thing by making sure that there was clinical care in place in the facility during that period of time and that there was a fire watch in place so that no one's health or safety was in danger in that process.

Mr. Shariff: My final supplemental is also to the same minister. Is the minister willing to make a commitment to this Assembly that he will review the policy pertaining to transferring Albertans in long-term care and make it humane, caring, and compassionate?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I'd be very happy to say to this House that I will work with the Calgary health authority. They've been keeping our department and this minister informed of the process, but we will be reviewing the process that they undertook to make sure that it was done in an appropriate manner, and we will be reviewing the protocols that we have in place with respect to long-term care residents and how they're treated in this province. There are good standards in place, there's good training coming, good things happening, but we can always benefit from experience and learn from those experiences, and we'll do so in this case.

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

Health System Pressures in Grande Prairie

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In order to support and encourage its growth, Grande Prairie needs an accessible, reliable health system, and the current system is under massive pressure. My questions are to the Premier. The health system in Grande Prairie has been operating at breaking point for months. The region will even be losing its last psychiatrist this month. Aren't the residents of Peace Country health region entitled to the same level of mental health care as residents in Edmonton, Calgary, or southern Alberta?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, it builds on the priorities that we have established as a government that all Albertans should share in the same quality of life no matter where they live in the province of Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Grande Prairie is growing faster than Fort McMurray: 27 per cent since 2001. The increasing rate of growth in Grande Prairie was entirely predictable. My question is to the minister of health. Exactly what action was taken by the ministry over the last two years to prevent a health staffing and infrastructure crisis in Grande Prairie?

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

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's no secret that Alberta is growing, that all regions of this province are growing. Some regions are growing faster than others. Fort McMurray, of course, had a long-term sustainable growth at high levels, but areas like Grande Prairie are growing rapidly as well. It's a good problem to have, but it comes with its stresses. So we have a workforce strategy

coming to ensure that we can attract and retain the health workforce that we need. We're supporting the health regions with the support that they need, the financial support that they need, to make sure that they can deliver the services they have. I understand that the Peace health district is recruiting new psychiatrists.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Again to the Premier: will the Premier take the advice of the Alberta Liberals and members of his own caucus who support the project and commit to funding a new hospital in Grande Prairie and the redevelopment of the QE II hospital into a community health centre? Your own caucus supports it.

2:00

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I don't have to take their advice.

In fact, we're a lot further ahead than where the Liberal caucus is today with respect to the hospitals. In fact, there has been a significant donation of land given for the hospital by a very good citizen of Grande Prairie. Work is under way to ensure that as the housing is developed around the hospital, there's proper drainage in the entrance to where the hospital will be located, the proper roads will be in place. All that work is currently being done, so we're a little ahead of where they are.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Climate Change

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Like most Albertans I was shocked when the Environment minister mentioned a \$5 billion sticker price for the Tory carbon dioxide pipeline scheme. This pipeline is destined to divert massive public resources into a technology that even the Prime Minister, Stephen Harper, admits is unproven. My question is to the Premier. Why would the government even consider throwing away taxpayers' money on a multibillion dollar boondoggle that would even dwarf the Ottawa failed gun registry?

Mr. Stelmach: I think part of the gun registry was a lot of CO₂ or maybe methane.

However, this is an issue where here is the only jurisdiction in Canada to bring forward legislation to not only measure greenhouse gas emissions but also put limits. Those who cannot meet those targets will actually through regulation pay offsets to ensure that we do reduce the amount of greenhouse gas emissions in this province, about 100 or so major emitters.

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, recently federal and provincial Conservatives announced a task force to kick off the carbon dioxide pipeline dream. Days later a task force member, David Keith, said that the pipeline is designed to allay political concerns about growing CO₂ emissions from all the new tar sand projects, and in fact there are more cost-effective technologies available. The government has not done its homework, just like with their intensity target approach, and they're trying to bamboozle the public into believing that something is being done. Why hasn't the Premier or his minister produced evidence that carbon capture is even going to work in the first place?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the facts are that the fund that the member refers to is a \$156 million eco trust fund. The same kind of

dollars went to Ontario, went to Quebec – of course, more than we received in Alberta, but \$156 million to start working together on options on how we can reduce the greenhouse gas emissions, deal with other contaminants in the air like methane, sulphur dioxide. Really, quite frankly, we're way ahead of other provinces in this area.

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, carbon capture is very, very expensive. It requires massive amounts of energy and materials, and worst of all it's not even a proven technology to reduce climate change. With this same \$5 billion we could invest in conservation, public transport, sustainable energy and realize actual carbon savings and build a better quality of life for Albertans to boot. Why should we throw away \$5 billion or more on what amounts to CO₂ landfill when so many more common-sense alternatives are available?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I think I made it clear on a number of occasions when addressing this issue in the House that carbon sequestration is really just one of a number of alternatives that are available and that the government is exploring. This task force that the member refers to is going to be looking at the economics of sequestration, and it's going to be providing both the federal and the provincial government with some advice as to whether or not this is, in fact, something that is feasible.

I do need to correct the member when he talks about \$5 billion. Yes, I did bring that number forward, but that's not a number that creates expectation that the government is going to be involved. That's the estimated cost for not only the pipeline but the ability to actually capture the CO₂, much of it borne by . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus Aureus

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. MRSA, or the superbug, is not new to Canada or to Alberta's hospitals. MRSA emerged soon after the invention of penicillin. It is usually considered a hospital-acquired organism, but now strains of MRSA are appearing in our community as well. It is clear that MRSA is here in Alberta, and it's here to stay. Since we now know that the bacteria is no longer just in hospitals, my questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. What is the province doing to contain this bug?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is important to point out that MRSA is not localized to Alberta. It is an issue that's being dealt with right across North America and in other jurisdictions as well. We are not unique in this circumstance. With the advent of penicillin and other antibiotics some drugs have become resistant, so we have to take extra steps to make sure that they're not transferred. Those extra steps, Mr. Speaker, are very straightforward and very simple. It's washing hands, it's proper hygiene, so preventative measures. We need to educate Albertans about the necessity to do that. We have a provincial health office which is informing Albertans through their work with the Alberta hand hygiene strategy. There has been a Do Bugs Need Drugs? program, and they're working on . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My supplemental is to the

same minister. Should Albertans be concerned about the possible outbreaks of MRSA in their communities or their hospitals?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I can't say that you didn't warn me about the 45 seconds idea.

MRSA outbreaks are a potential issue for all jurisdictions. Albertans should be aware that infections can be prevented if they take effective and proactive measures to protect themselves. Twenty to 40 per cent of healthy Albertans carry a bacteria that can develop into MRSA in our noses without causing any health problems at all. It's spread by person-to-person contact. Washing hands is very important.

The Speaker: Well done.

The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: can you tell us how Alberta's cases compare to the rest of the country or the rest of the world?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, the number of MRSA cases is increasing throughout Canada and internationally. A report that was developed by the Public Health Agency of Canada in 2005 indicated that the highest increase of MRSA since 1998 was in central Canada's hospitals. In the United States MRSA is also present in hospitals and the community, and it has been prevalent there for many years. Here in Alberta we saw the first case of community-associated MRSA in 2004 in Calgary. So it's both in the community and in hospitals. It's something that we know about, that we're dealing with. Again, I have to emphasize, even when the opposition makes light of it, that the most important thing we can suggest to both health care workers and to Albertans is that the way to prevent spreading is to wash your hands.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

St. Albert West Regional Road

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The provincial government needs to clarify its position on the west regional road with St. Albert constituents. To the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation: is the minister committed to designating the west regional road as part of highway 2?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker – thank you for that question, by the way, hon. member – I've had a meeting with the mayor of St. Albert, and we've discussed that road. They're going ahead and doing some preliminary work on it. We're also waiting to see, when the report comes back, if it will meet all our specs, and we'll address it at that time.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister provide a written funding commitment for the west regional road, please?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, as I said, the mayor is happy with the situation that's going on there. We're doing an alignment study further to the north. We understand the traffic problems coming through the city of St. Albert, and we'll address it at the time when they finish the studies.

Mr. Flaherty: I was hoping for a yes, Mr. Speaker.

Can the minister give the St. Albert residents and businesses any indication when and how the road will be completed?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, as I said, it's actually the city of St. Albert building the road. We're going to look at a later date at whether or not we will assume it as a provincial highway.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

2:10 Affordable Housing

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the last few months in Red Deer residents of two large apartment buildings have received notification that their apartments are going to be converted into condominiums. Many of these residents are fixed-income seniors, people with disabilities, and low-income families. They are very concerned about where they will live when they are evicted. Affordable housing is a major concern throughout the province. One area that's having a significant impact on the supply of affordable housing has been the conversion of apartment complexes to condominiums. Can the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing tell us what this government is doing to help Albertans who can't afford to buy condos and want to continue to rent?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I do want to say that we have had unprecedented growth in the province. With the rising cost of construction developers are finding it more profitable to convert rental units into condos. I also want to say that at the same time that those individuals sell the condos, a large percentage of them in return rent them back.

Mrs. Jablonski: Can the same minister advise if this government has plans to deal with this issue?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, on March 19 we did have a report presented to us. We had 1,400 presentations, whether they were in person or through a letter. Those recommendations have been brought forward to us, and we are going to respond to those recommendations.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. My final question is for the minister responsible for Service Alberta. What are the requirements of a landlord when they want to convert an apartment to a condominium?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is unfortunate that someone's loss is someone else's gain. In fact, the conversion of an apartment may become an affordable housing unit for someone else.

The fact is that 180 days' notice is required to do a conversion and, unfortunately, only 90 days for a rent increase or for a renovation. I think that with many landlords it would be naive to suggest that they're not using the 90-day opportunity to get people out. I look forward to the minister's housing task force to see if there isn't a way to align the days involved.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Calgary Northeast Ring Road

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the increase in Calgary's population, a ring road is absolutely essential to ensure traffic mobility. Visionary planning is equally necessary to avoid the problems which occur in trying to redesign or retrofit an existing major artery as has been the case with both the 16th Avenue portion of the Trans-Canada highway and Glenmore Trail. Planning involves consultation and collaboration which take into account both future needs and present stakeholders' reality. Provincial consultation on the ring road to date has been clearly substandard. To the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation: what active consultation was undertaken before the northeast portion of the ring road P3 contract was signed?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, there's been a considerable amount of consultation on the northeast ring road. It started back in '04. We've had extensive consultations. We had a March open house. We had more in '05. We just had another open house the other day. We've worked together with all the different stakeholders. We've talked with the different municipalities. We've dealt with the municipality of Calgary and the municipality of Rocky View. There was lots of consultation.

Mr. Chase: Calgary residents, landowners, and local businesses have raised serious concerns about the redesign of the northeast ring road, which no longer provides access at McKnight or 32nd Avenue. With their access cut off, these people are effectively walled in, costing them millions. Again to the minister: what plan does the government have to compensate these groups, or will you commit to altering the project accordingly?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, after the consultations in '04 and '05 we made some minor adjustments and made some changes, and there will be an emergency access built at Chateau Estates to give EMS some quick access to the community. There'll be an alternate access at Country Hills Boulevard from 84th Street, that will be just east of the new interchange, 100th Street NE will be paved, and a new access will link 84th Street at 32nd Avenue.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Considering that negotiations with the Tsuu T'ina First Nation regarding the Weaselhead crossing have been stalled for more than 40 years, what backup plan or alternate route for the ring road to cross the Elbow River does the government have under consideration?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, as everyone knows, there are negotiations going on right now with the Tsuu T'ina nation. We have no reason to believe that we won't get a deal with Tsuu T'ina. In fact, the Tsuu T'ina are just getting some of their appraisals completed, and our negotiations will continue. That's a very important link for Alberta highways and for the city of Calgary.

The Speaker: That basically concludes question period. Yesterday there were 96 questions and answers; today there were 90.

Now we have to deal with a point of order. The hon. Government House Leader.

Point of Order Reflections on Members

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During question period today in a series of questions brought forward by the Member for

Edmonton-Ellerslie, the hon. member, I would suggest, offended rules 23(h), (i), (j), and (l) of the Standing Orders in that he made allegations against another member, he imputed false and unavowed motives, he used abusive and insulting language likely to create disorder, and he introduced a matter into debate that offends the practice and procedures of the Assembly. But he did more than that, Mr. Speaker. What he did was tantamount to a breach of privilege. I would refer you to 24 of *Beauchesne*, at page 11, and to 64 of *Beauchesne*, at page 19.

The most important characteristic of a Member of this Legislative Assembly is their personal integrity: their honesty, their integrity. Whether the hon. member did it intentionally or whether he was just reckless makes no difference. In his second question, when he asked the hon. Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture about CIP grants, he impugned my integrity as a member of this House. He also impugned the integrity of at least two other members of this House: the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks and the hon. Member for Foothills-Rocky View.

The three of us were candidates in a leadership process last fall. The three of us did fundraising.

Mr. Martin: Did you win?

Mr. Hancock: No, I didn't win. Actually, I did win. I get to do a really great job, and I don't have to spend all my time travelling. But that's not the point.

The point is that when the hon. member raised a question about CIP grants, he asked the question about whether or not any of the CIP grants were used to fund election campaigns. In doing so, he insinuated that government money was improperly funnelled through CIP grants to my leadership campaign. There is nothing more important to me than my integrity, nothing. The hon. member may have had a point about CIP grants, but you don't make points about CIP grants by calling into question the integrity of hon. members of this House.

Mr. Speaker, I know that the hon. member is an honourable member, has honesty and integrity, and I know that he will, if prompted by you and perhaps on his own volition, get up and apologize to this hon. member and to the two other hon. members of this House that he maligned and to the members of this House.

2:20

The operation of the political process and governance in this province, Mr. Speaker, is something that we ought to hold dear. We engage in partisanship on a daily basis, and that's fine. We engage in banter. We sometimes call into question whether people are telling the whole truth all the time. We engage in a lot of this type of discourse. But we should be very cautious not to go to the point where you call into question the integrity and the honesty of another member. It ought never to be done without proof, without something to suggest it, other than just a drive-by smearing. It ought not to be raised in that fashion.

Mr. Speaker, I'm not asking for a breach of privilege in this matter. I think the hon. member didn't intend what he did. But he did do it, and I would ask him to rise and apologize to myself and to other members of this House who he maligned and to all members of the House because by raising questions in that manner, he drags all of us into disrepute.

The Speaker: Now, I take it that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre as the Opposition House Leader is going to speak to this point of order.

Ms Blakeman: Yes, if I may.

The Speaker: Proceed.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would argue that the allegations made by the Government House Leader are not in order and are not substantiated by the questions that were asked by the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie. I understand the points that have been made with such enthusiasm and a great deal of heat by the hon. Government House Leader, but in fact the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie named individuals using their proper form in this House as members of a group that had an identifiable or common association; that is, they were members that are sitting in this House that were also all leadership candidates. They were not singled out, directed for them for . . . [interjections] They were referred to specifically as a group of people for which there is missing information for this House.

There are two facts that we're dealing with here, Mr. Speaker. One is that there were a number of donators to the leadership candidates who sit in this House who were not disclosed. This has been widely reported in the media and has been discussed in this House.

The second piece of that is that 43 grants . . .

The Speaker: Hold on here. Please, stop for a second. Political party activities have no business in this House. This is not a question of competence for a government. Now, the hon. Opposition House Leader may proceed, but we're not getting involved in something that already violates *Beauchesne*. Political contributions have nothing to do with the point of order as far as I can understand. We're dealing with a question. We're dealing with a response. Please stay on topic.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you for the advice, Mr. Speaker. The member was asking a question. He was asking a question directed for a group of people that are sitting in this House. The question was not, as the hon. Government House Leader put it, on the record. It is available in *Hansard*, and perhaps the Speaker already has a copy. I have a copy of what the member was reading from. He was asking if the groups that were receiving the grants – I'm paraphrasing here – were receiving this special treatment as being friends of top Tories. That was referring to the donators, not to the members.

So I understand that some offence was taken here, but it was not what's in the question, to be perfectly honest about it. An insinuation that has been put on the floor by the hon. Government House Leader simply wasn't made. A question was asked, however, and when we look at a number of the other citations that were made, 23(h), (i), and (j), no one was imputing anyone's motives. It wasn't even raised.

The other sections that were quoted as citations by the minister: there were no allegations made, particularly against a member. There was information sought about why these grants were being allocated outside of the criteria that the government had set forward. There were no motives talked about at all in the language of the questions, and I would argue that there was no abusive or insulting language used at all. The questions are pretty straightforward, Mr. Speaker, and there was no abusive language or descriptive language that was used. I'm referring to *Beauchesne* 484. Again, there were just no motives that were being imputed in this question.

So I would argue that although I regret it if the question was misheard, it certainly wasn't delivered that way. It was a pretty matter-of-fact question. I argue that the tests required for the citations that have been brought forward by the Government House Leader have not been met.

The Speaker: Are there others who wish to participate? Nobody else?

Well, you know, hon. members, we were actually making pretty good progress till today. The question from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, the first one, which wasn't dealt with, basically says, "If a group cannot raise matching funds up to \$10,000, it will be considered on a nonmatching basis. However, documents tabled in this Assembly show that this government is breaking its own rules." Well, that wasn't even contested. There were no rules that were broken. This chair is very familiar with the rules of the community initiatives program and was an author of some of them in years gone by. It very clearly states that if a group does not have the matching portion, the \$10,000 can be allocated, so that's just a bunch of nonsense, hon. member.

Secondly, we come to the brunt of the whole business. "The . . . Minister of Finance" named, "minister of health" named, "Minister of Sustainable Resource Development" named, not part of a group as far as one can read this, named individually, "all have secret donors to their leadership campaign." Well, the chair has already pointed out that what that has to do with government business, the chair does not understand. *Beauchesne* clearly points out that political party matters are not the subject of the question period. Then the question: "Can this minister assure this House that groups receiving this special treatment" – now, the question is: what special treatment? – "are not secret friends of top Tories?" Boy, if that isn't innuendo, you know, I must have just arrived. I've been here 28 years, and this is blatant innuendo.

This is a point of order. This is not dealing with the integrity of members of this Assembly. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie can do better, and I expect him to do better, and I ask him to withdraw his words, please.

Mr. Agnihotri: Sorry, Mr. Speaker. I don't want to apologize.

The Speaker: Well, hon. member, I'm going to point out the consequences of you not abiding by my request, and the consequences are not very nice. So I'm going to do this three times just so there's no misunderstanding, and the third time the hon. member will be named.

Now, this has happened before in the history of this Assembly when people have tried to make a point. Once they're named, they lose salary and everything else. Please remember that. People have done that to showboat in the past. This has happened. I was here once with one hon. member.

So I'm going to ask the hon. member to accept the ruling of the chair and withdraw his comments. That's my first request. I'm going to ask the hon. member to accept the ruling of the chair and withdraw his comments. First time.

Mr. Agnihotri: Mr. Speaker, as you said, the rules were not broken. If you read the guidelines . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, please sit down. I asked a few minutes ago if any other hon. member wanted to participate. I looked around. I waited. The hon. member did not move. The member was given a chance to participate. We've had under our process a submission provided by one, a submission provided by another. A ruling is then given. The chair has given the ruling.

Now, for the second time the chair is going to ask the hon. member to withdraw his comments. The hon. member can either withdraw his comments or not. If he would just put on the record that he doesn't want to, that's fine.

2:30

Mr. Agnihotri: I didn't do anything wrong, Mr. Speaker. I don't want to withdraw my comments.

The Speaker: Fine. The hon. member was given an opportunity to participate; the hon. member chose not to take an opportunity to participate. For the third time: will the hon. member withdraw his comments?

Mr. Agnihotri: Mr. Speaker, no.

The Speaker: That's perfectly fine, hon. member. I will now name you. This is the first time in nine years that I've actually done this. This is not a good day. It's not a good day for the member. I'm sorry, hon. member. Please leave.

Hon. members, the hon. member cannot return to the House until approval is given by the House.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Government Motions**

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Alberta Treasury Branches Act

14. Dr. Oberg moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly concur with the continuation of the Alberta Treasury Branches Act.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I certainly appreciate taking time for this very important motion after the ruling you just gave.

Mr. Speaker, section 35 of the Alberta Treasury Branches Act requires that once in every five years a motion be introduced to facilitate a debate on whether the Alberta Treasury Branches Act should be repealed. The purpose of this clause is to assure Albertans that the government will review their investment in the Alberta Treasury Branches to ensure that it continues to serve a valuable purpose. Prior to opening up this motion for debate, I would like to take this opportunity to discuss what the ATB has provided and continues to provide to Albertans.

In 1938 the members of this Assembly made the unprecedented decision to create a financial institution headquartered in Alberta for Albertans. The government invested \$200,000 in the Treasury Branches, and the first Treasury Branch started taking deposits in September of 1938. While the Treasury Branch started as Alberta's piggy bank, its purpose was quickly expanded to promote a voucher system designed to also encourage Albertans to support Alberta-made products and services. Throughout its history Treasury Branches have been supported by Albertans all over the province, and today the Treasury Branches, now ATB Financial, provide full deposit-taking, lending, and wealth management services to all Albertans and throughout the province.

I'm proud to say, Mr. Speaker, that this initial investment of \$200,000 has grown considerably. At December 31, 2006, ATB's equity was \$1.6 billion. More importantly, ATB continues to serve over 600,000 Albertans who have chosen ATB to provide them with some or all of their financial services. It operates in 245 communities throughout Alberta through 154 branches and 134 agencies. It finances roughly \$16.5 billion in loans to Albertans and their businesses.

Albertans have indicated in the past that they would like the government to consult with them before any fundamental changes are made to the status of the Alberta Treasury Branches, and we will continue to honour that request. I have been and remain very confident in ATB's ability to continue to provide excellent service to Albertans, in their ability to ensure that access to core financial services will be available throughout the province, in their ability to

attract and retain highly skilled labour within Alberta, and most importantly, Mr. Speaker, to operate in a financially responsible manner.

Therefore, as per section 35 of the Alberta Treasury Branches Act I move that the Legislative Assembly concur with the continuance of the Alberta Treasury Branches Act.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this is debatable. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My pleasure this afternoon to rise in debate on Government Motion 14, the continuance of the Alberta Treasury Branches Act.

I was prepared, Mr. Speaker, to run through some of the highlights of the performance of the Alberta Treasury Branch recently, the number of branches and so forth, but the minister has done a fine job of encapsulating some of the good work that they do. I would, however, like to also point out what a great corporate citizen the Alberta Treasury Branches have been. I've just recently been reviewing their annual report, and there's a long list of community organizations and annual events that they contribute to either through sponsorships or donations. In particular, 11 different United Way associations across the province benefited from an annual corporate fundraising campaign last year, as did STARS air ambulance, the Stollery Children's Hospital Foundation, and the Alberta Children's hospital. So, clearly, not just in terms of providing financial services but in many other ways as well, Alberta Treasury Branches contribute daily to the lives and success of citizens of Alberta.

Since 1997 the Alberta Treasury Branches have been a wholly owned government corporation. In preparing for today's debate, I went back to May of 2002, the last time that this Assembly debated this particular motion, that is required, as the minister said, under section 35 of the act. I suppose that there are a couple of things that come to mind immediately when you look at that. The first one is whether or not it's sufficient under the act to only have this discussion in this Assembly once every five years. Given the tremendous amount of flux in financial markets and the changes that take place, not just locally, but if you look at, as an example, the number of amalgamations of credit unions that have taken place over the last five years, if you look at the move towards consolidation of banking services nationally and globally, it's perhaps arguable that it would be good to have this debate more than once every five years.

I also note that the minister of the day, Mrs. Nelson – of course, to put this into context, Mr. Speaker, there was an awful lot of debate in 2002 as to whether or not the Treasury Branches should be privatized – indicated in her remarks: "Before we make any decisions with regard to this institution, we must have a thorough review of the financial services industry in Alberta." I don't know whether or not there'll be an opportunity to hear from the minister today, but I'm certainly wondering whether or not that review was ever undertaken by this government and, if it did take place, in fact, whether or not the results were made available to the public, or do they sit on a shelf somewhere, as, unfortunately, we know does happen more often than anybody would likely care to admit with reports that this government receives.

Mr. Speaker, also relevant, since we're discussing the continuation of the Alberta Treasury Branches Act today, is the Auditor General's most recent report, from last year, where he outlined some concerns, none of them major. To the credit of the Alberta Treasury Branches most of the concerns that have been identified by the Auditor General over the last several years have been addressed, but I think this is an appropriate time to point out that there are still some areas of concern for the Auditor General.

One of those that he identified was lending policy compliance. He indicates that, in fact, there has been satisfactory progress toward addressing his concerns although this is a concern that he's repeated in at least the last two if not, I believe, three annual reports. So this is an ongoing concern from the Auditor General. He indicates that improvements in the processes have been made but that improved compliance results will take time, and "ATB must continue to reduce breaches of key internal controls to meet its appropriate targets for acceptable performance."

The Auditor General also identified some concerns around the branch operations compliance. Again, he's indicated that while there has been progress made, there is still room for more improvement and that this would take time. To use his exact words, he says that "although significant improvements have been made in underlying processes, further positive results will take time."

2:40

Lastly, he had a concern around the enterprise risk management strategy and again indicates that he's made a recommendation to the Alberta Treasury Branches that they "implement an enterprise risk management (ERM) strategy to assist it in identifying and managing all significant risks." So the Auditor General has some minor concerns, not major ones but certainly, as I said, relevant to today's discussion, I believe.

Lastly, I think I'd just like to point out some comments that came from a very respected banker and a very well-respected Edmontonian, Mr. Harry Buddle, at his recent retirement. For those of you who aren't aware, Harry was the president and CEO of Servus Credit Union, which was formerly the Edmonton savings and credit union. He has been very public over the years arguing that Alberta Treasury Branches have an unfair competitive advantage against local credit unions. Larry Pollock from the Canadian Western Bank also has made similar comparisons.

The concerns always have been that Alberta Treasury Branches doesn't pay provincial taxes, being a fully owned Crown corporation, and the fact that they don't return their profits to their shareholders. In that case, of course, we're talking about, you know, the government of Alberta and specifically the taxpayers of Alberta. They do not have a need to participate in the Canadian Deposit Insurance Corporation because their risk management is held by the Alberta government. So those are concerns that have been well expressed in the public in the past.

Harry Buddle made a specific point of pointing out to MLAs in the audience on the night of his retirement – in fact, there were three of us in the audience, myself and two members from the Conservative caucus, so I'm hoping that the Finance minister may already have heard these comments from his caucus members – that he had complete confidence that the new Premier and the new Finance minister would be taking steps to address these inequities, as he and others see them. So we'll look forward to seeing some sort of a response from the minister in that regard.

It's interesting now that we're into April and the TILMA agreement is now into effect. It's been in the news a lot the last couple of days, and there has certainly been some discussion in this Legislature about TILMA. Mr. Buddle also commented that although there has been a grace period extended to financial institutions, which I believe goes until 2009, he believes that TILMA will affect the operations of the credit union. He said that they will be allowed to do business outside of Alberta, and other credit unions from other jurisdictions will then be allowed to be doing business inside Alberta. So there were some very profound comments made by Mr. Buddle on his retirement.

I think, as I've mentioned, that with TILMA now being in effect, even though there is a grace period, there may be some relevant

questions there as to the impact that TILMA will have on the operations of the Alberta Treasury Branches. Again, under the current legislation we would not be reviewing the Treasury Branches Act until the year 2012, which is at that point going to be three years following the full implementation of TILMA as it affects the operation of financial institutions. So I think that is a very relevant question for the minister to be considering today as he asks the House to support the continuance of the Treasury Branches Act.

So with those comments, Mr. Speaker, I'll take my seat and look forward to hearing the comments of others. If there is an opportunity for the minister to respond prior to the calling of the vote, I would be interested to hear his comments. Thank you.

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

Mr. Martin: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think all of us that grew up in rural Alberta know the reason why we have the Treasury Branch. It always seemed ironic in free-enterprise Alberta that we had an institution like the Alberta Treasury Branches, but clearly – I think the minister alluded to this – in 1938 there was no choice. Other banks were not serving rural Albertans particularly well during those times, so there was a need, and it's been a very successful institution ever since. Rather, when I looked at the facts, it's not a small institution anymore. I think – the minister can correct me – that they have about \$18.8 billion in assets, and that's very significant in this province to have that sort of money. That means, frankly, that they can at least compete with the banks because they have that sort of total number of assets.

I think the key thing is that always with the Treasury Branches there was some speculation that sometimes they weren't arm's length away from the government. That's been an accusation before. I'm not sure if the legislation, how that particularly works. You know, I know that that's how the Crown corporation legislation, say, in Saskatchewan works. But they have to be seen to have nothing to do within the government. I think the minister would agree with that, although there have been times in the past, whether they were right or wrong, where there was a feeling that that wasn't arm's length, the institution from the government, which the minister could tell us what actually makes that, in fact, the case now and if there have been some changes.

The member for Edmonton-Rutherford, though, I think did raise a fairly important point about TILMA. We're in the unknown here, and that's a point that I've been trying to raise: that we've signed into an agreement that has implications not only for private business. We understand trying to get rid of some of the red tape, but a lot of our public organizations, like I mentioned, AUMA and others, just don't know where it's taking us. This is probably a good example that the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford has mentioned: how does TILMA affect how ATB is going to be doing its business in the future? I think that's the concern that we have.

Probably, there are a lot of good things about TILMA, but it's a fear of the unknown, not knowing how it is really going to operate. I don't think the government, frankly, has done an adequate job. They're now going to set up consultations after we're into it, Mr. Speaker. I think that it would have been nice to have had these discussions before so that when we're talking about the ATB, for example, we'd have a better idea of just what the implications are. The Member for Edmonton-Rutherford is correct that, you know, we won't be looking at this five years with a whole – everything could be changed by then, five years from now, because of TILMA.

So, again, as the member said, I would hope that the minister could at least give us some idea how he at this point sees TILMA and the ATB working. I know he'll say: well, they can compete in

B.C., and they can do all this and that. But I think we need to have a little better idea. Mr. Speaker, the ATB is an important institution in Alberta, and we're certainly quite pleased to participate and support Government Motion 14.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Additional members to participate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for this opportunity to speak to this motion. Actually, I found it quite interesting. Typically, when there is a statute or a law in the province of Alberta and it's time to review that statute or that law, there is usually some sort of a committee that is put together to go through it and see where improvements could be made or if changes are necessary or warranted. But, then, this is the first time after I became a member of this esteemed House that something of this nature is placed on the Order Paper, and I have to admit that this is the first time I see it.

A section in the act that established the Alberta Treasury Branches requires the Assembly to concur every five years to its continuation. So I thought this was quite unique and an interesting use of language, that, you know, we're basically saying: do you agree that this should be continued? And I ask myself: what should I base my decision on? How am I going to either concur or decline? Are people required to maybe ask their constituents or ask the people who use the services of ATB to rate the operations or basically evaluate the usefulness and the service levels of ATB?

2:50

ATB is a wonderful institution, Mr. Speaker. It started in the old days to help rural Albertans, to help people in smaller communities and in agricultural communities because other banks and other financial lenders were not willing to take those risks and were not willing to come to the aid of those smaller communities. So the ATB was conceived out of a need for, you know, help and assistance and also out of a vision that these smaller communities might actually simply wither and die and disappear if no assistance was afforded to them.

On the one hand, I have confidence and tremendous pride in the usefulness and the heritage of the Alberta Treasury Branches, but it's also a question of: how can members of this House either agree or disagree to the extension of the operations and the law that governs the Alberta Treasury Branches? So we need more information: if the government is hearing from Albertans whether, in fact, they're happy with the Alberta Treasury Branch network. If they're not, why not? What this government is hearing might actually persuade me to support this motion or might persuade me to decline and not concur.

The other thing which I was discussing very briefly with my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Rutherford is that it seems that the Alberta Treasury Branches are experiencing more growth in the urban centres now than they do in the rural centres. It's basically a shift or a change in the philosophy of the Alberta Treasury Branches. More new branches are being established in the bigger centres, which are already quite well served by the ATB and other institutions; they don't need any more. And more growth in terms of transactions and the work done is experienced in the urban centres. I am just concerned that this might signal a shift, where the ATB is going, basically, where the good buck is, and it might signal the start of maybe abandoning where everything started: the rural base. So that's one concern.

The other concern which I had is, basically, if there has been any review in the last five years since this Assembly concurred before,

or 10 years. Let's take two times when the Assembly was presented with the question to evaluate all of the financial services in this province. People are concerned, and quite legitimately, with service fees and, you know, banking charges and things like this. How does the ATB as a state-owned institution compare to other institutions that do the same transactions? Are they better? How about their service? How about their fees that they charge, the dividends that they give, and the interest that they afford, and so on and so forth.

If the hon. Minister of Finance can actually tell the House if, in fact, there was a study or an evaluation or an assessment of financial institutions and financial services in this province, that would be quite useful. If not, is he willing to undertake one in the near future? Again, this industry has grown, and it's an industry that affects everybody. Some people might argue that it's even an essential service. As an essential service, as we do education and health care and long-term care and things like this, everybody uses banking. Everybody needs a bank account. We all carry debit cards. We all have accounts. This is basically something that is not like the old days when it was sporadic and far between.

Just two simple things. I am inclined to support the extension of the ATB for the continuation of the excellent work they do. But, you know, minor things to really shed light on this issue, and I'm approaching it as a layman, as I always do: why do we need to do this every five years, and why can't it just be in legislation, that is reviewed in committee where people can ask more questions and seek more information?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'll be brief. It's a privilege to stand up and speak to Government Motion 14 on the continuance of the Alberta Treasury Branches. I'm very much in favour of it. From rural Alberta and just to comment to the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung: it is very much alive and serving Albertans, especially in the small, rural areas where there are no other banks. That's where the roots are, where it started. It's still very much there.

I have to praise the management of the Treasury Branches that they are able to continue those services in rural Alberta and to expand and to give those benefits in the big cities as well. The banking business is very competitive in Alberta. There's lots of banking going on, and there have been lots of amalgamations, whether it's the credit unions or in other areas, but I'm very pleased to stand up in this Assembly and to concur with the Alberta Treasury Branches Act. It does benefit Albertans, especially rural Albertans. I appreciate the fact that it's brought here every five years to be addressed and to have the concurrence of this Assembly, and I very much support it.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance to close the debate.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to all the colleagues for the comments. A couple of the issues that were raised during this debate had to do with TILMA, had to do with the potential on the credit unions.

First of all, TILMA will essentially have no effect on the Alberta Treasury Branches as there is no similar entity in British Columbia. So it will have no effect. When it comes to the credit unions, there is some issue. For example, the credit unions in British Columbia and Saskatchewan potentially have other opportunities to sell insurance, to do several other things that our credit unions do not by statute, so that is something that we are working on. We do not want

other credit unions coming into Alberta and having services that ours are not mandated to give, so that is something that we are considering.

Mr. Speaker, more importantly, I do want to draw the Assembly's attention to exactly what this motion says. What this motion says is that if this motion is defeated, then the Treasury Branches Act will be repealed, and the Treasury Branches will be no more. So this is a very important vote that we have here today, and I would certainly urge all members to concur with this motion, that states: "Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly concur with the continuation of the Alberta Treasury Branches Act." If we vote this one down, that act is thereby repealed, and the Alberta Treasury Branch as an entity is finished. So I would certainly ask the Members of the Legislative Assembly to agree with this motion.

[Government Motion 14 carried]

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Second Reading

Bill 3
Climate Change and Emissions Management
Amendment Act, 2007

[Adjourned debate March 22: Dr. B. Miller]

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to participate in debate on Bill 3, which is the Climate Change and Emissions Management Amendment Act, 2007, as sponsored by the hon. Minister of Environment. The environment, of course, is the buzzword now. Everybody is talking about the environment, and everybody is trying to jump on the environment bandwagon. Why is the environment so important, and why do people worry about the future of the planet and what impact we are having on Earth?

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

People talk about climate change, Mr. Speaker, and they talk about things like global warming and things like that. Climate change is an array of things. It's a group of phenomena or a group of certain things that are happening right now that people are becoming more anxious about and more worried about, all related to the consumption and production of fossil fuels. It's not a new phenomenon. It has been occurring, but it's been intensifying and getting worse.

Now, as a layman myself, I did a little reading into climate change to see where I stand on this issue. I reached the conclusion that it means more than temperatures rising. It means more than global warming. When people talk about temperatures and they say, "You know, this has been one of the worst winters we've experienced; winter doesn't want to leave us, and we've had snow for six months," they're oversimplifying the issue. They say: where's global warming when we need it? The issue is not just rising temperatures, but that is a main thing as well. We're talking about ice caps melting, Mr. Speaker. We're talking about deforestation. We're talking about certain species that are going extinct and habitat changes or destruction.

3:00

Now, the argument that you hear again being oversimplified in certain news media is whether it's man-made or whether it's a natural cycle. What if it's both? Or what if it's only a natural cycle, but man is not helping? Man is contributing to the acceleration of

climate change either by being an active participant in causing climate change or being a passive bystander that is letting climate change happen. Either way, man has a responsibility to protect the planet. You can't really put a price tag on saving the Earth and ensuring that it's available for our children and our grandchildren in as pristine a status as possible. We're talking water, Mr. Speaker. We're talking air quality. We're talking soil, pollution, food production, and food safety. All of these things come to mind.

With this realization I also came to another realization, that anything we do is better than nothing at all. I know that this bill as presented doesn't achieve what myself and many of my colleagues in the Alberta Liberal caucus would hope it would. Again, do we agree with something that is a half measure, or do we not do anything at all? My approach is to offer conditional support, or offer qualified support, for this bill although my preference would be to implement what we in the Alberta Liberal caucus have advocated for quite a long period of time now with respect to absolute caps on emissions instead of intensity targets.

Now, if you allow me, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to walk through some of my arguments. Absolute emission is basically the term used to describe the total volume of emissions for a particular source, whether it's an exhaust system from a vehicle or a stack from an industrial facility. Emission intensity, on the other hand, which seems to be the preference of this government, is the amount of greenhouse gases released that are measured against another factor, such as GDP. It's actually a ratio or a proportion, so GDP or a barrel of oil or whatever other choice you make. A more fuel efficient car, for example, will have lower emission intensity than a less efficient model, but the two cars may still have the same absolute emissions if the more efficient one is driven further.

Let's talk about GDP, for example. One plant is spewing garbage into the atmosphere. If it's allowed to operate at three times the capacity or three times the volume that it used to before, now it's making a ton more money. In fact, its intensity targets are lowered, so basically it's either matching the requirement or even bettering it. Now we can give them an award for having reduced their intensity targets, but the end result is that they have actually caused more pollution. That's one example.

The other thing is the current rate of economic growth in Alberta. If it continues at this pace, then we are likely going to see a lot more pollution happening. We have to remember that the province's emissions actually rose by a large percentage. Analysts are saying that between 1990 and the year 2020 this could really amount to about a 72 per cent increase. So we can implement intensity targets all we want, but the end result is more garbage and more pollution.

It seems like this province is actually in a race against time to exploit every drop of oil and every tonne of bitumen that we can extract. Yes, it causes prosperity and, yes, it creates a lot of opportunities for Albertans, but we also have to be aware of the consequences.

Now, I am under the impression that my hon. colleague from Calgary-Mountain View might be contemplating moving some amendments to this piece of legislation, and I keenly await his ideas and thoughts on this subject.

The other thing, too, is that there's also a consumer protection angle. In the second week of this Assembly reconvening for the Third Session, Mr. Speaker, I introduced Bill 202, which was calling for strengthening consumer protection in this province. It was unfortunately defeated in a division.

I'm also concerned about, you know, asking industry to pay for having not met their intensity targets. They then are likely going to off-load that increased cost in their operations onto the consumer. If there is any way we can ascertain that no unfair price increases are

passed on to the consumer, that would be something I'm definitely going to be extremely interested in. There is no incentive for companies to do anything because if it costs them \$15 extra per tonne of waste, they're just going to quite easily pass the \$15 on to the consumers. The environment is no further ahead, and the consumers are no further ahead. The company is not really forced to do anything versus an actual hard cap that comes with penalties for failure to comply.

Alberta is also the reason behind 40 per cent or so of the total industrial emissions in this nation, the highest in Canada, Mr. Speaker, higher than any of the other provinces and territories. Being the worst culprit, if you will, I think it's the only responsible thing to do to be vanguards in environmental protection in this country. If we're causing the most damage, we should be taking the lead in trying to alleviate what we can and mitigate some of those negative effects. It just defies common sense that you're going to exploit and produce and create waste and create pollution, but then you're not really worried about the future. I think that if we are accused of being the worst polluters, we should also be commended, hopefully in five or six or 10 years, for being vanguards of environmental protection and being leaders in environmental reclamation and cleaning up, basically. We need to clean up what we have destroyed.

Another argument, Mr. Speaker: are we here on a pilgrimage, basically just moving through, or are we custodians? I think we are custodians of our planet. We are allowed to use some of it, but we are also expected to save most of it. The Alberta Liberal caucus is actually advocating absolute emissions versus intensity targets, as I mentioned, and our plan, as sponsored by my friend from Calgary-Mountain View, calls for the introduction . . .

Mr. Eggen: You have friends?

Mr. Elsalhy: Yes. He is actually my friend, and I'm proud to be his friend, hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder. He has what it takes, and he understands the implications of not acting on environmental issues now. He doesn't want to wait.

In his plan he's talking about hard caps by the year 2012, which are absolutely necessary to achieve any real reductions and to have a positive and lasting impact on climate change in the near future. That's one thing, Mr. Speaker.

The other thing is leaving things in regulations. Again, this is a trend with this government, that everything is not left where it should be, in the statute itself or the law itself or the act itself. It's moved into regulations. One of the regulations in this is the specified gas emitters regulation, which has set out some new emission intensity targets and three options to achieve them for the largest industrial emitters, for the worst polluters, basically.

3:10

Regulations change. Ministers change and department heads change and deputy ministers change. So those regulations, the list of 100 or the club of 100, might be changed later to the club of 50 or the club of 25 or the club of 10. What assurances can we get that instead of just focusing on 100 now because it's sexy and attractive and people are expecting it, five years from now with certain pressure and certain lobbying this club might be shrunk to only 10? I think it should grow, and I think it should not be limited to just the worst emitters. Everybody from intermediate and up should be included in here because they all have an equal responsibility to clean up their acts.

Working with industry. I think it's necessary that industry is on board, but industry has also indicated that they are willing and ready.

The government has to offer the incentives and the carrots and then potentially also show the stick and wave it for those industries to start to comply. Industries by far are good corporate citizens within the framework of the laws and the statutes of the jurisdiction they work in, so I think we should create the environment for them to be exemplary. We should really create the environment for them to take the lead and show other people and show other jurisdictions and show the world what can be done in Alberta and how Alberta is unique.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will retake my seat. I look forward to participating at the latter stages of debate. Thank you for your indulgence.

The Acting Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a) any comments or questions?

There being none, the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise in support of Bill 3, the Climate Change and Emissions Management Amendment Act, 2007. Bill 3 builds on Alberta's leadership position on the management of greenhouse gases. I think we should be very proud that in 2002 Alberta was the first province to introduce climate change legislation. We were also first among the provinces to initiate the reporting of greenhouse gas emissions by large industrial emitters.

This act balances the growth of Alberta's economy with environmental sustainability by requiring industry through regulation to reduce their emissions by 12 per cent starting July 1 of this year. To achieve this target, industry can make improvements to their operations or buy an Alberta-based offset to apply against their total emissions or contribute to a new fund that will invest in technologies to reduce greenhouse gases in Alberta. These provisions were laid out in the specified gas emitters regulation. This is the right direction for an energy producing province, I believe. Alberta's overall emissions are obviously higher as a result of its energy production.

To push for an absolute cap or cut on emissions at this time would cause grave economic consequences. Cutting emissions intensity allows industry the capacity to invest in the development of technological solutions to climate change, and that is where the real solutions to the control of greenhouse gas emissions lie. The development of such technology will have the impact of getting long-term reductions in greenhouse gases as opposed to transferring wealth out of Alberta to purchase carbon credits in the world market.

Now, developing technology at home creates jobs in Alberta and uses Alberta expertise from universities and research facilities to its fullest potential. Alberta is in a very good position to move forward with new research and innovation. Innovation is a strong pillar in the government's 20-year plan, and we have research agencies such as ASRA, the Alberta Science and Research Authority, various research institutes, the Alberta Research Council, Alberta Ingenuity, and strong research programs at our universities. We are strategically organized to move ahead, and I will push for government and industry to invest more in developing new and better technology to control greenhouse gas emissions and, therefore, global warming. Without this emphasis, intensity reductions alone will not be enough to address greenhouse gas emissions and control of temperature.

Finding real solutions to greenhouse gas emissions was one of the goals of the COP 12. That is the committee of parties 12 environmental conference, that took place in Nairobi, Kenya, this past November. I had the opportunity to attend the conference on behalf of the government of Alberta. The conference was an excellent opportunity for Alberta's position on climate change to be promoted

on the world stage. That position was one of research and new technology to reduce greenhouse gas emissions into the atmosphere and capture and storage of carbon dioxide before it is released into the atmosphere.

During the conference I learned about the progress of other countries in handling climate change. In particular, Japan encouraged all countries to think about adding new tools to the Kyoto climate change tool box. Using new approaches allows the world to think beyond the Kyoto protocol of close to 10 years ago. One example is the Asia-Pacific partnership on clean development and climate change involving China, India, Australia, Japan, South Korea, and the United States. This agreement focuses on working with the private sector to develop ways of mitigating greenhouse gas emissions without destroying or severely impacting the economy. It also encourages investment in the development of clean energy technology. In that regard the direction of the Asia-Pacific partnership is similar to Alberta's approach to managing climate change as outlined in Bill 3.

The COP conference also showed that Alberta has an opportunity to develop technologies, such as carbon capture, that can be sold to other countries. I think that is why Bill 3 along with a specified gas emitters regulation will place Alberta at a real advantage. If we can develop climate change solutions in Alberta, it allows us to be in a leadership position here and abroad. It's rather interesting that the recent California climate change plan builds on the principle of technology export to other countries.

I was very pleased to attend the COP conference and, frankly, believe that Alberta's position on advancing technology options to mitigate or control the real impacts of climate change was well received and of interest to many delegates.

In closing, I believe that Bill 3, Climate Change and Emissions Management Amendment Act, and the specified gas emitters regulation build on Alberta's proud tradition of leadership on climate change. By embracing intensity reductions and increasing our investment in research and innovation relative to technology, we have the best chance of maintaining a strong economy and using the resources from it to attain in time absolute reductions.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a). Any comments or questions?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I just have been hearing so often this same refrain of Alberta being the first province, la-di-da, to put in some legislation in regard to carbon dioxide emissions. You know, if you're putting together something that, in fact, is deliberately . . .

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, are you rising under Standing Order 29(2)(a) for comments or questions?

Mr. Eggen: Yes. I was referring to the comments made.

The Acting Speaker: You were wanting to ask a question of the Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose?

Mr. Eggen: Yes. That's right.

The Acting Speaker: Okay. Proceed.

Mr. Eggen: If you're making intensity targets as the guide, I would like to ask the Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose, respectfully, if he,

in fact, expects that to be converted into absolute reductions and how? You know, my understanding is that as the intensity targets increase, the absolute emissions increase as well, so it becomes a difficult if not impossible thing to put those two together, and I would suggest that this, in fact, is deliberately deceptive.

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

Mr. Johnson: Thank you. I think that if the hon. member was listening, and I assume that he was, my point was that the end result should be absolute reductions. I believe that to be the case, but to get there, I believe that we must embrace intensity reductions along with putting a lot of resources into technology research and new technologies in order to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. If we don't do that, we have no resources to put into research and technology.

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

3:20

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, respectfully, it's as though you want to go on a diet by eating more somehow. You know, you create the situation where you want the public to believe that they are getting reductions, but in fact you're getting intensity increase. You're getting absolute increase. So I would just expect and ask if we could have clarity from now on that this is only intensity reductions; it's not absolute reductions. I share the Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose's desire to have absolute reductions, but then why don't we just do it?

Mr. Johnson: I believe that I've made my point. Once again, I believe that absolute reductions is the end result, but perhaps we would travel down different roads to get there.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House, Standing Order 29(2)(a).

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, of course we're all interested in having an absolute reduction, but I wonder if the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose would agree that there should be some liability with the end user. What's currently happening is that the province of Alberta got the liability for the exploration, the drilling, all of the manufacturing of the gasoline and diesel fuel, yet it's exported to another location, and then a lot more emissions are produced. Wouldn't it be fairer if, in fact, the end user was taking a lot of the liability for the emissions, not just us in Alberta as we produce the product?

An Hon. Member: Good question.

Mr. Johnson: Yes, that is a very good question. Frankly, I don't know why there hasn't been more attention drawn to what the member has just stated. I believe that there should be much more attention paid to the consumer in the end, and I don't think it's fair that Alberta should be penalized just because we are the producer. So I think you raise a very, very good point. I hope that there'll be more discussion around that very point as we move on to committee and third reading.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, did you want to rise on questions and comments?

Mr. Cao: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I just want to ask the member or maybe get some idea – let's say that I have a plant in production and

my emission is at this level, and now there is an intensity reduction because my production capacity is already at 100 per cent. Then when the law asks me to reduce intensity, that becomes absolute reduction for my plant. Is that perspective correct? Can you comment on that?

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, you have about 30 seconds.

Mr. Johnson: Well, yes. I guess that would be the case if you were at the maximum, but I imagine that there would be opportunity to improve your plant or change your plant so that there would actually be ways of producing more. If that were the case, then I think that the intensity reductions would apply.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to make a few comments about the rate of development. It seems to me that this is what the crux of this debate is about. I mean, clearly, when we're talking about intensity, I think that we would all agree, even the Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose, that for the time being if we're just controlling intensity, it's clear that the amount of CO₂ going out is going to be greater. I don't think there's any argument about that. He may think that down the way all this technology will come forward. It might not. We're talking about a long ways down, even if we do get the technology.

The one thing that we do control is the rate of development, and that's what's causing so many problems in the province today: the overheated economy and, as a result of the overheated economy, more oil and gas, more tar sands to get in the American market as quickly as we can. Obviously it has implications for the environment, but it also has implications for all of the other things that we've been talking about in the Legislature in the last few days while we've been here; i.e., housing, health care, you name it. It's all part of this overheated economy.

The only thing that we can control, that we have authority here to do – I believe and many others do that we need to slow down this pace of development for the time being. We've called in the short term for a moratorium on development so we can catch up with our social and physical infrastructure. If we control the pace of development, it certainly will have some impact on how much CO₂ we're putting out. I think the bill says about a 50 per cent intensity reduction based on 1991 emission levels. At a 4 per cent growth rate, say, the total emissions will rise by 66 to 83 per cent above 1990 levels in the next little while. I mean, that's the reality of what we're facing.

I don't think, you know, that overnight we can stop it all, but certainly we can take a look – and the Minister of Energy is over there – at the new projects coming on, not the ones that are there. We move ahead. People are beginning to ask: well, who is benefiting by this? We're hurting the environment. Our rents are going up. Health care is in trouble. We can't keep up with the social and physical infrastructure. So what's it all about? Clearly, the Americans want us to do this, and I expect the federal government does. But that's what we can control right now: that pace of development. I think that's the major thing that we should be looking at.

In terms of the intensity reduction – and I don't know if the minister is here – this bill may be redundant, depending on what happens federally, because we're aware that the parliamentary committee, much to the chagrin of the federal Conservatives, has passed a bill. We don't know what's going to happen with that,

whether it might trigger an election or not, or whatever, but if that bill came forward and was passed in the House of Commons, our bill would probably be redundant or superseded because of what they've done. So that'll be an interesting development as we go along in terms of debate on this particular bill that we're facing. If that bill is passed ahead of this one, this probably doesn't mean much, then, because federally they would be controlling it.

Again I would say, regardless of that, just to conclude, that I think that it's the pace of development that is a concern. It's a concern with the environment, as I said, with our social and physical infrastructure, making it very difficult for ordinary Albertans right now.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a). Any comments or questions?

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd just like to ask questions of the hon. member about where he thinks the government's role is in providing incentives and appropriate disincentives that would help move us more quickly along the line to absolute reduction in emissions.

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

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a combination, I think, a combination of things. I'm talking, first of all, about the pace of development. We have to recognize that we have to do something there. Then if we're going to take the technology rather than some of the pipe dreams about pipelines and CO₂, I think alternate energy. We should be giving tax incentives. We've called for Alberta to maintain its role, if you like, as the energy capital but to start to move towards alternate energy as quickly as we can. So I think there are a lot of things that we can do, but as long as we're keeping this pace of development, even if we're giving the money for alternate energy, we'll still be falling behind with CO₂ emissions. So it's a combination of both things, I think, hon. member.

The Acting Speaker: Any others?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Coutts: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to join the debate on Bill 3, the Climate Change and Emissions Management Amendment Act, 2007. I want to provide, first of all, some historic work that Alberta has done to show that Alberta is a leader across this country in trying to address climate change and greenhouse gas emissions. This bill in itself is another first for Alberta and for Canada, and I don't know if everybody really realizes that. Certainly, I've heard some comments that the federal government may be coming out with their own emissions and greenhouse gas legislation or targets or whatever might be coming from them. But, you know, Alberta has always been a bit of a leader, knowing full well that a lot of the emissions and our economy are based on the oil and gas industry and what we provide all across North America.

3:30

In view of this, 10 years ago, in February of 1998 Premier Klein, a former Premier of this province, named Canada's first cabinet committee on climate change, which consulted with stakeholders from the academic, environmental, industrial, and business commu-

nities about Alberta's response to global warming. In October of 1998 Alberta announced its strategy for action on climate change, a plan that was well received throughout Canada. Then in 2003 the Climate Change and Emissions Management Act passed by this government made Alberta the first province in Canada to set out a legislated framework to implement our climate change action plan. We were the first province to require large industrial emitters, who produced about 70 per cent of our industrial greenhouse gas emissions, to report those emissions. The bill that we are discussing today would not have been possible if we had not taken the initiative and led the country on this issue.

I commend the minister for his approach with this bill. It balances what is technologically and economically achievable for our large industry emitters with the need to protect our environment. This bill will allow all Albertans to enjoy both a clean, healthy, natural environment and the benefits of continued economic prosperity. Because of this government's planning and progressive legislation like Bill 3, I think we can all at least say a very good start is being made in Alberta's future.

I have another reason to be confident of that as well, and that is the government's record of environmental stewardship. As co-chair of Alberta's Climate Change Central I have seen first-hand how the government's leadership on this issue has already made a difference in our environment. I'd like to just point out a few of those programs that have been put in place by Climate Change Central that show that we have been leaders for quite a while.

Climate Change Central, or C3, is a uniquely Alberta way of responding to global climate change and its impacts. It's a public/private partnership of government, businesses, and other stakeholders who are interested in pursuing greenhouse gas reduction initiatives, that has been operating since 1999. C3 has financed feasibility studies for innovative projects like using waste heat from a new power plant to heat buildings in Grande Prairie. Projects like this one cut fuel consumption and ultimately greenhouse gas emissions.

In 2001 Climate Change Central hosted western Canada's first greenhouse gas emissions trading simulation, allowing industry, government, and environmental groups to experience a simulated greenhouse gas trading environment. Exercises like this have helped these groups prepare for initiatives like this bill that we are discussing today.

Since 2003 the ME First, a municipal energy efficiency program led by Climate Change Central, has invested \$30 million in interest-free loans to 60 municipalities. Projects like retrofitting traffic signs and recreation centres and upgrading heaters and furnaces in municipal facilities to energy efficient models have saved municipalities \$2.8 million annually but, more significantly, have reduced those municipal environmental footprints.

In a similar vein, Climate Change Central's Alberta Plus initiative gave over \$600,000 in grants to Alberta municipalities for pilot projects exemplifying energy efficient design and construction. From 2004 to 2014 these projects will pay for themselves five times over, saving municipalities more than \$3 million in energy costs and cutting greenhouse gas emissions by 24,000 tonnes.

In the past four years Climate Change Central has also partnered with the government of Canada to offer the pilot emission removals, reductions, and learnings initiative. This innovative program uses a competitive auction process to allow potential bidders to propose, for instance, reducing their greenhouse gas emissions by 100,000 tonnes between 2003 and 2007 at the price of a dollar per tonne. If this bid is successful, PERRL will pay the seller \$100,000 over the five-year period.

For a modest total investment of \$15 million, this program has explored ways to reward climate change action in sectors that may

