

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, November 26, 2007**

1:00 p.m.

Date: 07/11/26

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

The Speaker: Good afternoon, and welcome.

I would ask members to remain standing after prayers so that we may pay tribute to a former colleague who has passed away in the last few days.

Let us pray. As we commence proceedings today in this Assembly, we ask for divine guidance so that our words and deeds may bring to all people of this great province hope, prosperity, and a vision for the future. Amen.

Mr. Dallas Wilbur Schmidt
August 9, 1922, to November 22, 2007

The Speaker: On Thursday, November 22, 2007, Dallas Wilbur Schmidt, DFC and Bar, passed away.

Mr. Schmidt was first elected in the election held March 1975 and served until 1982. During his years of service he represented the constituency of Wetaskiwin-Leduc for the Progressive Conservative Party. During his term of office Mr. Schmidt served as a cabinet minister without portfolio from April 3, 1975, to August 29, 1976, associate minister for energy and natural resources responsible for public lands from August 30, 1976, through to March 22, 1979, and as minister of agriculture from March 23, 1979, to November 18, 1982. Mr. Schmidt served on the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, Standing Committee on Law and Regulations, Standing Committee on Public Affairs, and the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing.

Mr. Schmidt was a distinguished veteran of World War II, having served with the Royal Air Force with No. 227 Squadron from 1940 to 1945 and from 1951 to 1956. He was the recipient of the Distinguished Flying Cross, 1942, and the Bar of the Flying Cross, 1942.

The archives of the Royal Canadian Air Force includes the following for Flying Officer Dallas Wilbur Schmidt, DFC and Bar, of Wetaskiwin, Alberta, who served with the 227 Squadron in the defence of Malta.

On his first sortie he shot down an Italian aircraft. In September 1942, he obtained a hit with a heavy bomb on an enemy merchant vessel which subsequently sank. A few days later he attacked a destroyer, in a convoy, with gunfire. In spite of intense opposition he pressed home his attack causing an explosion behind part of the ship's gun positions, which probably indicated hits on a magazine. On another occasion in November 1942, he destroyed two Ju 52s and assisted in the destruction of a Dornier 24. His aircraft was hit in some thirty places by return fire and the port engine was set afire, but he succeeded in extinguishing the flames and flew the damaged aircraft back to base landing it safely in very difficult circumstances. F/O Schmidt's total score was 5 1/2 enemy aircraft destroyed.

A memorial service will be held on Tuesday, November 27, 2007, at 2 p.m. at the Mulhurst Community Hall, Pigeon Lake, Alberta.

With our admiration and respect there is gratitude to members of his family, who shared the burdens of public office. Our prayers are with them.

In a moment of silent prayer I ask you to remember hon. member Dallas Schmidt as you have known him. Rest eternal grant unto him, O Lord, and let light perpetual shine upon him. Amen.

Now, hon. members and ladies and gentlemen, I will invite Mr. Paul Lorieau to lead us in the singing of our national anthem. Mr.

Lorieau is in the Speaker's gallery. Would we all participate in the language of our choice.

Hon. Members:

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

The Speaker: Hon. members, before we sit, let me just point out Mr. Paul Lorieau again, who Saturday night last on national TV did an absolutely magnificent job singing the national anthems of both America and Canada in an evening dedicated to the dedicated, hard-working, and courageous men and women of our Canadian armed forces. Well done, Mr. Lorieau. [applause]

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Visitors**

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to take this opportunity to introduce to you and through you three very special guests seated in your gallery today. First, Mr. Michael Chisholm. Mr. Chisholm has recently been re-elected as the member of the Saskatchewan Legislative Assembly for Cut Knife-Turtleford constituency, a large rural constituency that borders our province. Mr. Chisholm has also recently been appointed the legislative secretary to the Premier of Saskatchewan, responsible for western Canadian economic co-operation. From the number of green and white jerseys in our streets last night I suspect there is some significant potential for co-operation at least till spring.

The second guest, Mr. Speaker, is Chuck Moser. I would like to take this opportunity to introduce him to you. He currently works with the University of Alberta with their faculty of physical education, alumni relations department. I suspect that most of the members of this Assembly know Mr. Moser as he is an active member of the Edmonton community and an example of community service that makes this city and province the best place in the world to live and raise a family. Mr. Moser is also no stranger to this Legislature as he formerly served as the executive assistant to the former minister of transportation Henry Kroeger.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to introduce to you and through you Mr. Bradley Chisholm. Bradley Chisholm was recently hired as my executive assistant. Prior to joining my team, Mr. Chisholm was a commercial real estate lawyer with the Calgary firm Macleod Dixon. Bradley attended the University of Calgary law school. Prior to attending law school, Bradley received his undergraduate degree in economics from McGill University and his international baccalaureate from the United World College of United States of America.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

The Speaker: Mr. Premier, do you have a guest?

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assem-

bly, seated in the members' gallery, the nominated candidate for the Progressive Conservative Association of Alberta for the riding of Airdrie-Chestermere, Mr. Rob Anderson. Rob is a lawyer with a very successful law firm; a very, very active member of his community; and somehow finds the time to raise a young family of three children with his wife, Anita. I'm proud to have Rob as a member of our team as we build Alberta's future. I would now ask that Rob rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:10

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

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly 25 grade 6 students from George P. Nicholson school, located in my constituency of Edmonton-Whitemud; in fact, located in my neighbourhood of Twin Brooks. Accompanying the students is their teacher, Maxine Sprague, along with parent helpers Raylene Palichuk and Lora Lee. The class is here at the Legislature participating in the School at the Legislature program, and I can say that that's a very excellent program. I was able to answer some of their questions today. I'm looking forward to an opportunity to meet with them again and answer further questions because, of course, we can't do our jobs as MLAs unless citizens do their jobs as citizens and raise important questions with us. I can assure you that this grade 6 class can and will. They're seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of our Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the House 97 visitors from the city of St. Albert, Muriel Martin school. These three classes of grade 6 students are in the middle of their studies on government. I can tell you from when we had the pictures taken earlier this morning, asking them questions, that they had all the right answers. I look forward to visiting with them in their classrooms. They are accompanied by teachers/group leaders Mrs. Jody Bialowas, Mrs. Katie Boyd, Mlle Danielle Jean, Mrs. Linda Foley, Ms Shelley Verlik, and parent helpers Mrs. Dixon, Mrs. Gamble, Mr. Martin, Mrs. Roche, Mrs. Kielt, Mrs. Jones, Mr. Nelson, and Mrs. Beaubien. I believe they're in both the members' and public galleries. I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of our Assembly.

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

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today. Two of my favourite schools in Edmonton-Rutherford are joining us today. The first are 21 students from Sweet Grass school. They're accompanied by Mrs. Fiona Mark, their teacher. I don't believe they're in the gallery yet. They're coming in at 1:30 to watch question period.

The second school is Greenfield school, celebrating their 40th anniversary this year, by the way. Twenty-one students as well from Greenfield are with us today, led by teacher, Mr. Jeff Webster, and two parent helpers, Mr. Riad Ghazal and Mrs. Shari Johnson*. Again, they're joining us at 1:30.

I would ask that all members give them the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Food.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you a group of staff from the Ministry of Agriculture and Food. Too often the spotlight on government business is focused on the Legislature, but it's important to note the significant work carried out by our many public servants in Agriculture and Food staff offices across the province, including many who are located right here in Edmonton at the J.G. O'Donoghue Building. Today I am proud to welcome 10 valued employees of our strategy and business planning division. Their work to support and guide our agriculture and food industry is critical, and they certainly do a tremendous job. Today these folks had an opportunity to tour the Legislature and learn more about the official government process that helps them carry out the good work that they do. With us today and located in the members' gallery are Marcia Hewitt-Fisher, Dale Dowswell, Bill Olive, Eileen Chauvet, Elaine Kalynchuk, Debra Van Gaalen, Isabel Simons-Everett, Amber Gosselin, Shamim Rajani, and Laureen Kennedy. I'd ask that they please rise now and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to other members of the Assembly someone I had the pleasure and privilege of working with in this building a few years back. Charlene Adam is here with her daughter Julie today. They are in the members' gallery. The Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon and I had an opportunity to speak to the grade 6 class at their Leduc school a month or so back, and I can tell you that the questions were a lot tougher than the ones we get in this particular House. I would ask Charlene and Julie to please stand and receive the warm applause of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today it is my distinct pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Morningstar Mercredi and Lorraine Hoffman. Lorraine Hoffman is an elected member of the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation council and is currently serving her second term as councillor. Morningstar Mercredi is a member of the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation and a committed advocate of her people. Both guests are actively involved in bringing to light the health care crisis caused by tar sands development and the lack of adequate resources to deal with the mounting health crisis in the area. On behalf of my constituents and all Albertans I'd like to thank them for their efforts and advocacy on behalf of all First Nation people and for all Albertans. I would ask that they both now please stand and receive the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my privilege to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly today Marton Kiss, a resident of Mill Woods. Marton and his wife, Lisa, are challenged with medical concerns and are faced with a critical housing situation. I'd ask Marton to please rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

head: **Members' Statements**

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

*This spelling could not be verified at the time of publication.

Human Trafficking

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On October 13, 2007, I attended the Alberta Symposium on Human Trafficking in Red Deer, hosted by Changing Together, a centre for immigrant women in Edmonton. Human trafficking has been described as a modern form of slavery. It is a serious human rights violation and is reported by the United Nations to be the fastest growing form of transnational organized crime.

At the symposium I discovered that I was among the many people who find it hard to believe that slavery still exists. I learned that there are more than 27 million slaves in the world today, including people in forced labour, women and girls trafficked for the sex trade, and children kidnapped and brutalized to be used as child soldiers. Slavery is flourishing in many parts of the world, and it is still every bit as ugly as it was 200 years ago.

Human trafficking nets organized crime \$7 billion each year. It is the third most profitable criminal activity after dealing in illegal weapons and drugs. According to Interpol a trafficked woman can bring in anywhere from \$75,000 to \$250,000 a year. In Canada organized crime groups have used young aboriginal children as well as eastern European women and children in trafficking between provinces for the purposes of sexual exploitation and other activities. In 2004 the RCMP estimated that 600 to 800 persons are trafficked into Canada annually and that an additional 2,000 persons are trafficked through Canada into the U.S. each year.

Mr. Speaker, 2007 marks 200 years since Britain abolished the transatlantic slave trade, thanks to the tireless work of William Wilberforce, a British MP. Today there are 27 million slaves worldwide, and we must work together with other nations and organizations like Changing Together to bring this international human rights tragedy to an end now and forever.

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

Health Care Aides

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand before you to recognize health care aide awareness week, beginning today, November 26, as promoted by the Alberta Continuing Care Association, Alberta Home Care and Support Association, and Alberta Senior Citizens' Housing Association. We all know that Alberta has experienced a critical shortage in health care aides, and stakeholders are working hard to raise awareness about training and employment opportunities in this compassionate, caring career.

Health care aides provide personal assistance and support services to people of all ages, including the elderly, the disabled, the acute or chronically ill, and those in need of short-term assistance or ongoing support. It is estimated that 80 per cent of the hours of care provided to Albertans receiving continuing care services are provided by health care aides. I can attest to that, Mr. Speaker. During my father's short stay in the Strathcona care centre, he received the greatest care, and it was the health care aides who were always there, patient, caring, and with total kindness.

The Alberta government supports the provincial health care aide promotion awareness campaign. This campaign aims to increase the health care aide workforce across Alberta as well as increase enrolment and generate the largest number of employable graduates in provincial health care aide programs. I'd ask all members to please join me in recognizing the significant value of health care aides in this province's health workforce and the positive difference they make in the lives of Albertans in their care.

Thank you.

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

1:20

Affordable Housing

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'd like to talk about Marton and Lisa, two brave Albertans whose lives are crumbling around them. Lisa has fibromyalgia. Marton was just diagnosed with MS. Confined to a wheelchair, Lisa's inaccessible apartment has become a prison. She has been stuck there since August. Medical expenses have eaten up their savings, and now they're supporting themselves by selling off one piece of furniture at a time to pay for necessities like food and rent. Lisa is unable to evacuate in an emergency. She can't make it to medical appointments or physiotherapy.

This is unforgivable. As public servants we have a sacred duty to ensure that the people we represent have at the very least enough food to eat and an affordable place to live. We have a duty to see that all Albertans share the benefits of our economic growth. You expect to hear stories like this in war zones, not in Alberta. I fear for Marty and Lisa, Mr. Speaker, and I fear for all Albertans in similar situations because, clearly, public support for less fortunate citizens is woefully inadequate.

How much worse will it be in years to come, after the boom is over? This government is spending nonrenewable resource revenues as quickly as they come in, setting barely any of it aside for the future. How will even modest programs like AISH be funded in the years to come? History shows that Alberta's most vulnerable will pay the heaviest price for the government's failures. Do we want to be remembered as presiding over a regime that allowed people like Marton and Lisa to fall through the cracks amidst unprecedented wealth? Or are we prepared to take a hard look at our priorities and invest a reasonable amount of our vast resource wealth to properly support disadvantaged Albertans?

Simple human decency demands that we do more for Marton, for Lisa, and for the thousands of Albertans like them. We need to do more today, and we need to start saving our nonrenewable resources now, creating sustainable revenue.

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

Political Party Donations

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is long overdue for reform of its campaign finance laws. Big money dominates the donation list of both the Liberal and the Conservative parties. These parties accept hundreds of thousands of dollars per year from big oil and other large corporations. Let's not kid ourselves. These donations come with strings attached. When big oil writes a cheque, they do so with the expectation that there will be minimum change to the royalty system. They do so also with other issues.

Tenants face gouging rent increases so big landlords with deep pockets can profit a little more. Big landlords make bigger political donations than tenants, so the needs of ordinary families are swept aside, and rent guidelines are rejected. The effect of big money even shows itself in long-term care facilities. The recommendations of the Auditor General are ignored, and conditions at long-term care facilities get worse instead of better. Big money and big political donations have a corrosive effect on democracy, Mr. Speaker. It means that the needs of regular families get put on the back burner in favour of the needs of large, profitable corporations, who can take care of themselves.

It's time for Alberta to follow the lead of the federal government and Manitoba and ban all political donations from corporations and unions. Our democracy has as its basis the individual citizen acting freely in their own interests and the interests of their community. Individual citizens should also be the financial basis of our democracy. It should not be undermined by special interests using their wealth to distort public priorities.

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

Grey Cup

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Close to a million Saskatchewan residents and countless others across the country and beyond breathed a collective sigh of relief yesterday as their beloved Roughriders prevailed over the Winnipeg Blue Bombers in the 95th edition of the Grey Cup. Christmas came exactly one month early as the Riders did just enough to win 23-19. It wasn't the most exciting game ever, but that happened in 1989 with the same Riders. At that point Kent Austin was the quarterback. Yesterday he was the coach leading the team, the Green and White, as they ended the CFL's longest Grey Cup drought. That's over. The SkyDome became Riderville. It was a sea of green.

When I saw Jack Layton at the airport in the morning, I wondered if he'd like to know that, number one, his provincial cousins did not win the last election in Saskatchewan and that, number two, every time the Stampeders, the Eskimos, or the Riders have won the Grey Cup, the NDP were not in power. With the new Premier in Saskatchewan, Brad Wall, and the new administration in this province I believe the future does look very bright for Saskatchewan and Alberta, even brighter than this tie, I might say, Mr. Speaker, even if we do cheer for different football teams. I encourage families, friends, and neighbours to enjoy this victory because, pun intended, I do hope that the Saskatchewan party lasts a long time. But let's face it; we want that cup back here in Alberta.

In the meantime, I do have to say that we have a guest here, Mr. Chisholm, a representative from Saskatchewan. I hope he'll convey our warmest wishes to the new Premier. We look forward to working with him and the Saskatchewan government to make the new west even better, a strong force throughout the country and the world.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the Riders for the entertainment.

Teachers' Unfunded Pension Liability

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, another milestone has been reached between the Alberta government and the Alberta Teachers' Association, representing the province's 35,000 teachers. In a meeting of over 400 representatives across the province the ATA's emergent representative assembly overwhelmingly endorsed ratification of the historic agreement. This memorandum of agreement will ensure labour peace for teachers, parents, students, and school boards for over five years.

Some of the details of the agreement are that the government will assume the teachers' pre-1992 pension contributions, teachers will provide five years of labour peace, teachers will receive a lump-sum payment of \$1,500 in the spring, and teachers' pay will increase by 3 per cent in year 1, with 2 through 5 based on the Alberta average weekly earnings index. School boards and students will now have guaranteed funding and budget predictability. Mr. Speaker, there will be uninterrupted classroom instruction for the next five years.

The next step is for teachers at the local level to ratify the MOA, and then the ATA locals and local school boards can work together to finalize their collective bargaining agreement by January 31,

2008. The Minister of Education, our Premier, Mr. Frank Bruseker, and, frankly, all teachers ought to be congratulated on this deal.

Thank you.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition to present to the Legislative Assembly today, and it reads:

Whereas the ongoing rent affordability crisis is contributing to Alberta's worsening homelessness situation, we, the undersigned residents of Alberta, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to take immediate, meaningful measures to help low-income and fixed-income Albertans, Albertans with disabilities and those who are hard-to-house maintain their places of residence and cope with the escalating and frequent increases in their monthly rental costs.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Seventy-six more signatures on this disability petition which urges the government to ensure that the remuneration paid to employees working with people with disabilities is standardized across the sector regardless of where they work, ensure that these employees are fairly compensated and that their wages remain competitive to reflect the value of the services they offer, improve those employees' access to professional development opportunities, and introduce province-wide service and outcomes-focused level of care standards.

head: **Oral Question Period**

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

Affordable Housing

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A couple in south Edmonton needs this government to take some real action on affordable housing. Marty suffers from MS, and his wife, Lisa, has severe chronic conditions and requires a wheelchair. The wait list for an appropriate unit is long, and their rising medical costs are driving them into poverty. Lisa and Marty have applied for assistance from the rent supplement program, AISH, home care, Aids to Daily Living, and income support, and they are still forced to sell their furniture in order to pay their rent and medical expenses. My question is to the Premier. What else can they do, Mr. Premier?

1:30

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, this is an issue that has just been raised in the House, and I'll ask the ministers responsible to further investigate this particular situation.

I know that the taxpayers provide substantial support to those in need of housing, those with disabilities also through the rent supplement program. We're doing a lot in terms of finding housing that's compatible with the needs of the particular family in question. If someone has fallen through the cracks, we certainly want to know about it, and we'll deal with it.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. They've tried to tell everybody they can about it, Mr. Premier.

This government held a housing symposium in 1998 that clearly

identified the need for more accessible housing. Ten years have passed with precious little done. Now this government comes out with another 10-year housing plan. Desperate people do not have decades to wait. My question again is to the Premier. Why are people like Marty and Lisa still forced to wait for an affordable place to live when the need for accessible housing was identified almost 10 years ago?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, progress has been made on affordable housing, but the hon. member forgets the fact that between 500,000 to 600,000 new Albertans have moved to this province to seek opportunity. Affordable housing and housing available for special needs, those individuals that quite rightly should remain in their home rather than institutionalized, is, of course, a very top priority of the government. It's centred around the quality of life, and we expect that all Albertans should have some equitable quality of life in this province. That's why we'll look into this particular situation.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Marty and Lisa also face enormous costs for medications. In 2004 the first ministers' conference agreed that "no Canadians should suffer undue financial hardship in accessing needed drug therapies [and that] affordable access to drugs is fundamental to equitable health outcomes for all our citizens." My question again to the Premier: when will this government finally implement a public pharmacare program that reduces the burden of rising drug costs on low-income Albertans like Marty and Lisa?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, one of the mandates, of course, to the minister of health is to put together a pharmaceutical strategy so that it encompasses all Albertans. I know that a number of years ago Alberta was proud to have the longest list of insured drugs. So many more drugs have been added to lists covering various diseases, obviously with the new research that's being done in the province of Alberta, so we're constantly upgrading that list. But we do have to look at an overall strategy, and I also submit to this House that Alberta can't go it alone. We develop our strategy in conjunction with the federal government because there's dual responsibility.

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

Affordable Housing in Fort McMurray

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I spent Friday, Saturday, and Sunday in Fort McMurray. There are many wonderful things about that community, but over and over I heard intense concerns about how this government is managing, or rather failing to manage, the growth of that region. The single biggest concern is with housing, which, I was told, is now more expensive in Fort McMurray than in either Toronto or New York City. There is real frustration, verging on despair and anger, over this government's delay in releasing Crown land for housing. My question is to the Premier. Why is it taking years and years for this government to release enough land for housing development in Fort McMurray?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, again, one of those baseless allegations that the hon. member is known for. Municipal Affairs and Housing has made three land parcels available in the Timberlea area, totalling 1,000 acres, available for new housing. These developments are well under way, and new houses are being constructed. We're also

working right at the moment to secure another 700 acres for housing in the Saline Creek area. There's a considerable amount of money being invested in housing. Plus, there were affordable dollars that were transferred over to the municipality of Wood Buffalo. So there's substantial support there.

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, it's a real puzzle why this government will not release more land for development. I'm told that there are up to 40,000 people – 40,000 people – living in work camps in the Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo region and unknown numbers of others living in the bush. These people use the hospital but don't generate funding for it. They use police services, the water systems, and the roads, but they don't bring revenue in for these because they don't count as permanent residents. To the Premier: what is the plan from this government for managing this out-of-control boom so that Fort McMurray can attract more permanent residents and have fewer people living in camps and the bush?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, \$396 million was advanced to the community of Fort McMurray immediately after the swearing-in, the reason being that we recognized the need. A lot of the money is going for water and waste water. It's one thing to build a house, but of course you also have to deal with water and waste water and the construction of additional roads. We've also committed to four-laning highway 63. We're completing 881. There was recent completion of an overpass on King Street. There's other work being done around that area. There are millions and millions and millions of dollars that are going into the community.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Liberal plan for funding Alberta's future includes a steady, strategic approach to addressing infrastructure debt. This government refused to make those strategic investments for years, including under this Premier's watch as infrastructure minister, and is now trying to cover up the mistake by driving spending through the roof. A recent report by the TD bank described this government's approach to infrastructure spending as, quote, throwing fuel on the fire. To the Premier: can the Premier appreciate that it is better to have a long-term plan for roads and hospitals and schools than to depend on ad hoc announcements made off-budget every few weeks by this government?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, his plan for infrastructure in this province is probably similar to the position they took on the royalty framework, which is zip. They don't know where they are. It must get pretty difficult sitting on the fence all that time.

Dr. Taft: Point of order.

Mr. Stelmach: Raise another, a couple more.

There have been significant investments made in Fort McMurray. One of the critical areas is tied around housing, and this is where the industry, the government have come together to look at ways of moving construction further on housing. We also realize that housing is critical to the social well-being of the family, and the more houses we build in that area, the easier it will be to attract people to that region as well.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Low-income Support Programs

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Prosperity in this province is obviously not reaching all Albertans. Statistics gathered by the Edmonton Social Planning Council and Public Interest Alberta indicate that 22 per cent of our workforce is earning less than \$12 an hour and that 36 per cent is making less than \$15. Last Thursday the President of the Treasury Board said in this House, "We probably provide more services to people than I personally believe in," and that "you get out and work. Get a kick in the butt and do it." But for countless Albertans work does not pay. They don't need a kick in the butt. They need this government's compassion to help make ends meet. My questions are for the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry. Will the minister review the adequacy of benefits for low-income working families? The Alberta family package of benefits consists . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister. [interjection] The hon. minister. [interjection] The hon. minister has been called three times.

Ms Evans: You know, Mr. Speaker, budget 2007 delivered the highest basic personal tax exemptions in Canada, meaning the greatest earnings with no taxes paid. The highest. We increased tax credits by 3.6 per cent, saving Albertans \$92 million. For those that are not able to work temporarily or full time, we were able to provide additional supports. We increased supports this year. A typical working family with two children can earn up to \$38,200 before paying any provincial tax. Through our subsidy programs, through income support programs, through Children's Services subsidies this government provides the best.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In Alberta families making \$40,000 per year pay the same health care premiums as families earning \$400,000 a year, and those with better paying jobs are more likely to have their employer covering the premiums. Eliminating health care premiums will do two things. It will eliminate the need for complex administration. It will also put more money in the pockets of low-income households. Will the minister convince her cabinet colleagues to once and for all eliminate the Alberta health care premiums?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I am no longer health minister, but we have health care supplements for children, which increased again this year, covered a broader knowledge and number of children that needed health care premiums.

Relative to health care premiums I defer to the Minister of Health and Wellness.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A critical area for low-wage workers is the prevalence of part-time work with no benefits. Some Albertans are working three different part-time jobs and are still not able to make ends meet. This is an issue relevant to employment standards, but the results of the review of employment standards has somehow disappeared into a black hole. Will the minister look at those standards and change the code requiring employers to provide prorated benefits and pensions for part-time workers, at least those who work at least 15 hours a week?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, if you listen to the opposition today,

you would think the sky is falling and that we don't care for poor people. We improved the minimum wage this year to \$8 per hour. We put in a new indexing formula, so as of April next year we will have average weekly wage used to calculate what should be available to people on minimum wage. We have today the highest minimum wage in Canada after taxes and tied for highest among the provinces even before taxes.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

New Royalty Framework

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Just this month the state of Alaska raised royalties by 30 per cent retroactive to July 1. This is Alaska's second increase in just two years. Alaska will take in three times as much money per barrel of oil as Alberta. My question is to the Premier. Why can Alaska earn three times more per barrel of oil than Alberta can?

The Speaker: Well, the Premier is the Premier of Alberta, not Alaska.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I can only talk to the Alberta royalty framework, which is going to be implemented January 1, 2009. It's a framework that really, truly represents Alberta's entrepreneurial spirit, and that is that as oil prices rise, we will capture the upside, but if they do drop, then all Albertans will share in the risk. It's the kind of model that's going to provide the certainty and the predictability for continued investment in the province of Alberta.

Mr. Mason: Well, Mr. Speaker, entrepreneurial spirit really sounds like it's a spirit of giving to big oil companies.

Alaska produced a hundred thousand barrels of heavy oil less than Alberta but brought in nearly \$2 billion more in royalty revenue. Alberta has been shortchanged by billions on its royalties for years, and neither this government nor the Liberals have a plan which will fundamentally change that. My question is to the Premier. Why is it that Alaska can get \$2 billion per year more by pumping less oil?

The Speaker: Once again, stick to Alberta, please.

Mr. Stelmach: Yeah. Mr. Speaker, I think the leader is a bit confused. He's comparing oil to bitumen, significantly different, and probably has to get a little bit more knowledge in the whole area of the differences between bitumen and conventional oil. However, this is the regime, the royalty framework, that works well for Alberta. If you look at the macroeconomic indicators in the province of Alberta in terms of the amount of corporate tax paid to the province, of course personal income tax paid, and the huge investment that consumers are making here in the province of Alberta, that speaks well for the royalty regime.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, perhaps if the Premier familiarized himself with the royalty rates of other jurisdictions around the world, he would hang his head in shame for the pathetic royalty regime that he has brought forward.

Mr. Speaker, the reports that we're quoting indicate that the costs to recover the oil in Alaska are actually higher than the costs of recovering oil in Alberta's tar sands, yet Alaska can earn between two and three times as much as Alberta can per barrel of oil. Why,

Mr. Premier, does your royalty regime fall so pathetically short of Alaska's and other jurisdictions'? Why have you left so much money on the table?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I'm just wondering where the hon. member has found oil sands in Alaska. But if he has, I'm quite sure that he'll inform the House tomorrow as to where he made this great discovery.

All I can say is that the framework is working very well for the province of Alberta. Obviously, my response has really aggravated him because he's continuing to chip away. The framework is good for Alberta. It's going to provide the certainty and predictability that I mentioned before, and in the future we'll see more wealth generation in the province of Alberta.

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

Industrial Development in Alberta's Heartland Area

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Oil sands upgraders and other new construction in and near Edmonton will soon create one of the largest phases of growth in Alberta's history. It will create good jobs for generations. It will create wealth that will be felt for a hundred years and more. It has really just begun. The growth must be done right. My question is to the Minister of Environment. Albertans want clean air, clean water, and clean work. With the accumulative impact of Heartland construction affecting much of northern Alberta's environment, how will the cumulative Heartland impact be measured, kept clean, and communicated to Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, the member has pointed out a very important fact in his question, the fact that Albertans have clean air, clean water, and clean work, and Albertans want to make sure that it stays that way. That's what cumulative impact is all about. It's not about fixing something that's broken; it's about ensuring that we maintain that clean air, that clean water, and that clean work. The cumulative impact program talks about including monitoring and allocation and verification. It talks about setting up the necessary infrastructure so that we can ensure that we make the necessary decisions now that will keep the pristine environment that we respect so much in place despite economic development.

Mr. Backs: A supplementary to the minister of municipal affairs. As part of the recently released Kline report looks to Edmonton's grey water as a natural economic source for industrial water needs for the Industrial Heartland region, what will your ministry do to ensure that the city of Edmonton gets a fair return to its taxpayers for this resource?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member speaks of grey water, or recycled water, and the industrial area. I know this subject is being discussed by the Capital region integrated growth management plan as well as the Industrial Heartland cumulative effects. I know the Minister of Environment has brought forward a committee that has two phases. One of those phases is working on the short-term needs, and the second phase is working on governance, funding, and establishing a foundation. I do

believe that the first phase is to report to the Minister of Environment by the end of this year, if I'm correct.

Mr. Backs: Mr. Speaker, the second supplementary is to the Premier. As groups such as the Construction Owners Association are working to smooth out demand for labour and matériel as well as other issues impacting industrial construction of the Heartland region, we will see completion schedules extended. Construction work may continue for at least a generation: good work and good jobs. Mr. Premier, how will your government keep this wealth, this work in Alberta for Alberta and for Albertans?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, definitely we're focused on adding more value to bitumen and, of course, increasing the size of the petrochemical industry in the province of Alberta. Other than what we heard from the opposition, wanting to build upgrading plants in Manitoba, we're not going to do that. We're going to keep it in Alberta. The next step, though, is to have a large workforce. Of course, we just issued a construction workforce strategy that's going to train more people. It's focused on Albertans. We want to of course work with the First Nations and Métis nations to ensure that they all have a good opportunity to share in Alberta's wealth and also then work on an immigration policy so that we can build these plants in a very competitive manner.

1:50

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

Rural Alberta's Development Fund

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the MLA for Drayton Valley-Calmar and chair of rural caucus I know just how important rural Alberta is to our province, unlike the opposition over there. While we often think of rural Alberta in terms of our roots or our past, there's plenty of opportunity to branch out and create new growth, create a bright future. My questions today are for the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry. Last year our government invested \$100 million in the rural Alberta's development fund to help nurture economic growth and strengthen rural communities. How are those taxpayer dollars being used to benefit rural Alberta?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I have to thank the hon. member for his advocacy on behalf of rural Alberta and the development of this fund. We have some 21 projects that have already been approved, totalling \$18.4 million. They're helping us improve the issues related to providing interns for rural Alberta, wildlife stewardship, a number of very innovative things to build community capacity, including a \$3 million announcement recently to create a centre of excellence in Medicine Hat to develop unmanned vehicle exploration opportunities for land, sea, and air.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is also to the same minister. Given that the RADF annual report was a hot topic of discussion at the recent AAMD and C conference held in Edmonton last week, one thing the rural communities need is newer, updated infrastructure. Why aren't these capital projects being approved by this fund?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, first of all, of course, all members of the

Assembly are aware that this government spends this year more than a billion dollars on infrastructure throughout Alberta, so there's a hefty amount of money already there. The amount of money that this approves provides long-term economic development opportunities by engaging communities and regions in working together to develop things beyond the brick and mortar of replacing an arena roof or looking at other things that are capital. This is instigating an opportunity for learning and development through the use of the SuperNet and new connections, new innovations, and new networks that rural Albertans are creating based on their own capacity to develop things that can improve their own lives.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you. My last question is also to the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry. With the RADF operating as an arm's-length initiative, what mechanisms are in place to ensure that the disbursed funds are used appropriately?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, there is a grant agreement with terms and conditions to be met. There is an accountability framework within that grant agreement. The offices that are currently provided for in the Ukrainian Cultural Heritage Village to house the secretariat for the development fund have been retrofitted in a way that if the fund should no longer be in place, they can be very nicely used to support the administration of that particular centre. So on all fronts the RADF is being accountable for taxpayer dollars.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the next member is the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity. I'd just like to advise all hon. members of the House that since we last met, the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity has now arrived at a new point in his life. He's arrived at his 60th anniversary of life on planet Earth. I understand from people who have arrived at the age of 60 in the past that there's a new form of wisdom that kicks in automatically at that time.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Highway Construction

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government's failures to plan for the boom are obvious on so many levels. One of the many is our province's inadequate, substandard highway network. Highway 63 is only now being twinned, something the Alberta Liberals have been urging since the 1980s. For too long this government has waited while the safety of Albertans has been compromised and the connection to the oil sands, so important for our prosperity, incomplete. As a result the government is paying exorbitant, inflationary costs due to their failure to plan. To the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation: after waiting so long, when can the residents of Fort McMurray and those who risk their lives . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, we're spending over a billion dollars on twinning highway 63.

Mr. Boutilier: How much?

Mr. Ouellette: Over a billion dollars, Mr. Speaker. We started this year. We're twinning right now from 881 into Fort McMurray. We're starting on our five-lane bridge crossing the Athabasca River in Fort McMurray. We're also doing some twinning on highway 43

north of Fort McMurray. We did some widening on 881, so now or next year, when we've completed that little short piece of twinning that we're doing, there will be two choices to go to Fort McMurray at least. We've got 881 and highway 43.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The question was: when will the twinning of highway 63 be completed?

Another case of the government consistently behind the times can be found in southern Alberta with highway 3. It is a vital component in the international and interprovincial trade route that is the Canamex corridor. The Alberta Liberal caucus has been consistently pushing this government to twin this east-west connection that is so key to the prosperity of the region and our province. To the minister: why, despite all of the urging of residents and businesses along this corridor from Medicine Hat to the Crowsnest Pass, has the twinning of this road been put on hold?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, as minister of transportation in Alberta I have to look after the whole province from one end to the other. We have criteria that we have to follow. We try to keep all of our highways as safe as possible, and where the construction is needed the most that fits into the capacity of the construction to be done and the money we have to spend, that's what we work on in order.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The residents of northeast Calgary felt completely out of the loop when this government pushed through the revised route for that leg of the city's bypass earlier this year. Now it seems that the residents of Grande Prairie are suffering the same fate. Grande Prairie residents and their city council do not feel adequately involved in the planning for the southwestern bypass. Will the minister commit to collaboration, not just meaningless consultation, with the mayor, council, and the residents of Grande Prairie to ensure that both local and provincial goals are achieved?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, the wisdom you were talking about earlier I'm sure hasn't come through.

Mr. Speaker, I meet with all councils of all municipalities, and I always meet with municipalities any time they want. I met with a bunch last week at AAMD and C, and I plan on meeting with a bunch more at AUMA in Calgary on Thursday and Friday. I always try to work the best I can with them.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Tourism Promotion

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we all know, the Canadian dollar is the highest it's been in nearly 40 years. The results with respect to tourism are that costs are rising for American travelers, our largest economic partners. There is also growing confusion among Americans as to the Canadian passport requirements. My question is to the Associate Minister of Tourism Promotion. Has there been a decline in tourism from the United States to Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the hon. member for my first-ever question on the floor of the Legislature.

The member raises an important point because the U.S. is our largest tourism market. In fact, in the year 2005 almost a million visitors came to Alberta from the U.S. They spent some \$624 million. So they are very important. But to the member's question. I think it's great to point out that in this year alone we've seen, actually, an increase of 3.5 per cent U.S. visitation through direct ports of entry, while the rest of Canada has actually seen a 3.5 per cent decline. We think that's because we have the greatest product ever in Alberta, but there are also some advantages.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary question is to the same minister. What is happening regarding the passport requirements to minimize the impact on our visitors?

Mrs. Ady: Now, Mr. Speaker, passports are a federal jurisdiction, but we also know that they're very important to this tourism market. There is a bit of confusion out there. Sometimes the U.S. isn't sure whether they need a passport or don't, so we're working very hard with our partners and with the Travel Alberta website to let people know that you can still come into Alberta without a passport if you come via car. You only need a passport when you come by air. But there is some confusion, and we are continuing to work to clear that up.

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplementary question is to the same minister. What steps is our province taking to ensure it retains the growth in its tourism market share?

Mrs. Ady: Well, Mr. Speaker, he's right: tourism is a very, very competitive industry. In fact, all other places in the world as well as Canada want this industry, so they're competing against us. Our closest, most ferocious competitor is British Columbia, but they also bring us one of our greatest opportunities, which is the Olympics that are coming to us. The world is now travelling to Alberta to compete on our world stage, and we're going to use that opportunity to bring the eyes of the world to us. Some hundred million people and some 70 countries will see Alberta in World Cup in the coming two years, and we hope that we'll see more of Jan Hudec's victory this week in World Cup as we go forward. But Alberta is a great place, and the world is going to see it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, followed by the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Research and Development Funding

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The latest figures from Statistics Canada show that industry in Alberta is not spending remotely the same proportion on research and development as industries in other provinces. Industry in Ontario, for example, spent eight times more on research and development as industry in this province in 2005. Alberta is clearly punching below its weight here, and it is vital for our future prosperity that this change. To the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology: does the minister believe that this level of research and development spending is remotely sufficient to provide for Alberta's future prosperity?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member brings up a very valid point, and that is that industry in Alberta has not been contributing, perhaps, as much in certain areas as what the ratio to government expenditures might be in other provinces. But one must also remember that the province of Alberta spends a considerable amount more than most other jurisdictions on research and development within our postsecondary institutions, within our institutes. The Institute for Nanotechnology is one that comes to mind very recently. We are working with industry to encourage additional partnerships to take advantage of and leverage the government dollars, the taxpayer dollars that we have out there.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is notoriously difficult to raise venture capital in Alberta. The Alberta Liberals have had a policy for years that would change that by creating a joint government and industry venture capital fund. To the same minister: why hasn't this government moved to address the lack of venture capital in this province?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, as part of the mandate for my ministry we had a task force created by industry and academics that reported back to us. I'm sure the hon. member has already read the report as well as the ICT strategy report as well as the fibre road map report. In fact, I recall speaking about those here in this House.

There are a number of other things besides venture capital. It's not just venture capital. It's what you do after the research component to get it into that precommercialization stage and then into that commercialization stage. Then you bring in the venture capitalists. We're looking at that valley of death for these bright young minds are creating these products. We want to help them with that, Mr. Speaker, and the venture capital will come.

Mr. Tougas: A clear example of this government's failure to plan for a sustainable, prosperous future can be seen in energy research funding. In '05-06 this government put less than a million dollars into alternative energy research at the Alberta Energy Research Institute. This clearly is not planning for a diverse future prosperity. To the same minister: what possible justification does this government have for giving alternative energy research such minimal funding?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to see where he derived the numbers from because I think I could probably add up from the various departments and various research institutes that we utilize that we have a great deal more than a million dollars being invested in alternative energies. We have programs running at the University of Calgary, the University of Lethbridge, the University of Alberta as well as the Alberta Energy Research Institute as well as Climate Change Central. We have a number of programs. It's unfair to simply pull one number out of one report and say that that's the entire width and breadth of alternative energy that this province is doing. In fact, we are leaders in almost all of the areas of alternative energy: clean coal, wind, solar, the alternative energies that are nonhydrocarbon. We are considered global leaders in all those areas.

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

Aboriginal Economic Development

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta government has voiced its commitment to ensuring that all Albertans share in our province's unprecedented economic growth. Aboriginal Albertans make up the fastest growing and youngest population in our province, and many are in my constituency. My questions are to the Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations. What is being done to ensure that aboriginal Albertans benefit from our province's healthy economy?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutilier: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Through you to the hon. member and to the Assembly I want to say that in the past two years our ministry has viewed this as a tremendous opportunity. This opportunity, if I could give one example, is that we've supported 27 economic First Nation partnership initiatives, 27 of them. Of course, this helps in terms of developing First Nation industry as well as working with existing industry in developing capacity to create jobs, create capacity for the future, and for young people in Alberta, so we have a tremendous opportunity that we are certainly building on for the future. I want to say that those 27 initiatives are very positive in terms of the results that have been produced.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is also to the Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations. Can he please provide some examples of the kinds of partnerships between First Nations communities and industry that the Alberta government is helping to support?

Mr. Boutilier: I think, Mr. Speaker, that's probably one of the best questions I've heard in here today. Let me give you examples, concrete evidence of those partnerships that are going on: a joint venture between three First Nations and Enbridge on the proposed Gateway pipeline project to British Columbia, to the coast, is one example; an agreement with International Business Machines, IBM, in terms of First Nation and Métis communities who are creating opportunities with youth and education and also within small business in terms of opportunities. Of course, these are examples of a business incubator which we are working with. One final example: we're working with economic co-ordinators in the hon. member's constituency for communities in Hobbema, an economic example that we're working on as well.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental is to the same minister. Some of these developments are occurring on reserve, where the federal government has constitutional authority. How is the province working with the federal government to facilitate these important economic projects?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, this is so very important. I use the example in our own backyard in Fort MacKay, north of highway 63, where the highway is being twinned and being twinned very well. I want to give the example that we have just signed an innovative agreement between the province and the federal government with First Nations to commercialize land received under its treaty land claim. What this means is that the federal government have conceded that pertaining to commercialization Alberta's constitutional responsibility and Alberta regulation will apply. This is a

great example of a partnership that we have with the federal government, and I think it should provide assurance to all Albertans that we're working together: government, provincial and federal.

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

Health Issues in Fort Chipewyan

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 2006 medical examiner Dr. John O'Connor publicized evidence of extremely high rates of cancer in Fort Chipewyan. Residents there are 583 times more likely to have bile duct cancer than the population at large. More than 18 months have passed since this information was in the media. This community is still waiting for action. One big problem is that the 1,200 residents of Fort Chipewyan are not as important to this government as the big oil companies that contributed to their Conservative Party election funds. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: why has the government failed the people of Fort Chipewyan by continuing to do absolutely nothing but produce questionable reports?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. That question is so inflammatory and so wrong. In fact, we've discussed this matter in the House a number of times. I've indicated each time that we took the allegations of Dr. O'Connor very, very seriously, and we investigated. We asked Dr. O'Connor for the evidence behind his suppositions, and he didn't provide it. We asked again, and he didn't provide it. We asked again, and he didn't provide it. Finally, in August of this year he provided some information but not all the information. The Cancer Board has gone back to Dr. O'Connor asking for the information, and he hasn't provided it. In the meantime the Cancer Board and Alberta Health have reviewed all the deaths in Fort McMurray, a hundred per cent of the deaths in Fort McMurray, to determine whether there's a higher rate of cancer there or not, and it found that it's not a higher rate of cancer.

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question is to the Minister of Environment. There is no dispute that arsenic is a known carcinogen and that arsenic levels in the environment are compounded by industrial processes and industrial development, which has skyrocketed in the Fort McMurray region. A recent report found high levels of arsenic in the food chain in the Fort Chipewyan area, but with only two environmental compliance officers in the whole region almost nothing gets reported independently. Why has this ministry endangered the lives of thousands of people downstream by engaging in unreliable self-reporting systems?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's quite the contrary. There is ongoing testing of all toxins throughout the region, and they are not just related to self-reporting. There are a number of different organizations that work along with Alberta Environment. There are literally thousands of tests done every year. The member is correct: there is evidence of arsenic, but there is naturally occurring arsenic in the area. It is directly the reason why there's economic development, and the reason is because there are arsenic and other contaminants that are associated with oil sands that occur naturally in that part of the world.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Eighteen months ago we knew that Fort Chipewyan residents are very much more likely to contract bile duct cancer than counterparts in other parts of the province. My next question is to the Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations. How can you ignore the findings that show that this specific group of people is adversely impacted in larger proportions than Albertans elsewhere in the province? How can you justify putting big oil's profits before the well-being of people living in your constituency?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, thank you. I'm not quite sure what the hon. member is smoking, but I want to say this. The research that was made reference to: first of all, it was indicated that independent researchers out of Ottawa have indicated that the research that is being done by the independent general practitioner was not proper or protocol research that was done, yet Alberta Health has moved forward in a very prudent and responsible and measured way relative to the residents in Fort Chipewyan, which is of course the oldest settlement in all of Alberta. I might add that we are taking prudent action, contrary to what is really unresearched information by the hon. member.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Agricultural Assistance

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Amidst all the oil and gas prosperity the farmers who feed us have been dealing with economic hardships. One concern is that they're not getting fair compensation for the petroleum wells and pipelines on their land. They're also left to clean up the land after poor land reclamation by the companies. Rural counties have been fighting to get this on the government's agenda. To the minister of agriculture: why is the government not listening to the concerns of the landowners, and how are they working to resolve this particular issue?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think, probably, to say that we don't listen to the concerns of agriculture is a bit of a stretch at the best. In this particular instance, of course, the Surface Rights Board is not under my purview, but any time they have concerns, they can go to the FAO, and they will give them some guidance about where they might want to go when they have their problems.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, money is not the only thing that is needed to solve this crisis. Structural resources are needed to help our farmers. In 2002 your government closed regional agricultural offices, which provided important support and advice to these farmers. Again to the minister of agriculture: in this time of crisis for farmers why have there been so many quick fixes instead of addressing the long-term sustainability of Alberta's family farms?

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, I think, Mr. Speaker, it would be, probably, helpful if the hon. member would describe what she means by quick fixes, but I suspect that she may be talking about some of the programs that we help the agriculture industry with, so we're certainly out there when we can and however we can do it.

The talk about agriculture offices: in this day and age of IT abilities I think probably we've got that covered off very well. I have very, very few questions or concerns about that, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Cow-calf producers around my constituency are very worried about their futures. I received a call today from a cow-calf producer who is concerned that government programs are not reaching all the farmers and the meat producers. Further, the Auditor General also noted in his annual report that there are significant problems with aid delivery. Again to the minister of agriculture: why is the government failing to properly monitor and administer its support programs, whether they are alone or in conjunction with the federal government?

Mr. Groeneveld: Mr. Speaker, certainly there are concerns out there, and there's bleeding, and there's hurt very much in the red meat industry right now. But to say that we're not there is not quite true when we've just come out with a \$165 million program for the red meat producers out there. This is strictly a transition program. We've charged these people to come back with a long-term plan, with which we will once again assist them on delivery.

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

Emergency Preparedness

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta Emergency Management Agency's programs respond to emergencies in Alberta communities when the need arises for its disaster recovery programs. I know that the residents are very grateful for the funding that they receive in these circumstances. My first question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Can the minister tell us what the province is doing to prepare for future disasters?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member is right. Financial services is one of the primary issues that this government deals with; in fact, this last year approximately \$50 million in support. The main focus of emergency management is co-ordination, co-ordination between the first responders, firefighters, different agencies, volunteers, municipalities, ministries, and of course the federal government. Also, education is a primary focus of our ministry in looking at how we can handle disasters in a better way.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final and only supplemental is for the same minister. Mr. Minister, responding to these emergencies is a large undertaking that goes way beyond this agency's mandate and abilities. How is the response co-ordinated with other government departments?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, we do have a working group that works with the Sol Gen, with Transportation, with different agencies, Environment, SRD, looking at mitigation, working with the federal government to try to mitigate some of the effects of flooding, of disasters so that we are better prepared, making sure that we have a warning system that is not only top of the line but has the advancement to be able to warn people in case of tornadoes or severe storms.

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

Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A few weeks ago the Premier said that he could not see any examples of where this province has been shortchanged. A \$500 million decrease in the value of the Alberta heritage savings trust fund since March certainly sounds like shortchanging to me, and I'm going to guess that most Albertans would agree. To the Minister of Finance: in this time of prosperity in Alberta how can you possibly justify losing half a billion dollars in the heritage fund when this province records multibillion dollar surpluses?

Dr. Oberg: Mr. Speaker, I would have to ask the hon. member if he's kidding in that question. We've seen the Canadian dollar go up from 84 cents in February to \$1.10 at one point in time and now settling back in essentially the \$1.01, \$1.02 range. We've seen a huge amount of tumultuous times in the market in the past six or eight months. Five hundred million dollars is certainly a huge loss in the value, but I will suggest to the hon. member that he also take a look at the amount of income coming in from the heritage fund. You actually see an increase of about \$125 million from Budget 2007.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd just like to remind everybody that they take all of the income from the heritage savings trust fund and put it into general revenue. There is a dark side to Alberta's boom, and it comes in the form of this government's fiscal mismanagement. Edmonton leads the country with the highest inflation rate, house prices are soaring, 64,000 kids in the province living below the poverty line: that's what the future holds, and people are becoming anxious. To the Minister of Finance: when, when will you ease the anxiety of Albertans, take advantage of the prosperity that we're experiencing, and commit 30 per cent of resource revenues into the heritage savings trust fund?

2:20

Dr. Oberg: A couple of things. First of all, Mr. Speaker, each and every year, as the hon. member knows and realizes, we do inflation-proof the fund. This year alone there was \$400 million that was put back into the heritage fund, which is a significant amount. On top of that we have another \$1.3 billion that has gone into the heritage fund this year. Certainly, there are significant issues when it comes to people who are not earning the amount of money. Currently in Alberta, though, as the hon. Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry noted, a family of four making \$38,200 does not pay any income tax to the province.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In July of this year the Finance minister stated that he wanted to see the heritage fund double in size in five years and hit \$50 billion in the next decade. At the rate we're going, it's going to take 16 years just to double the size of the fund. Every day we wait is another day of lost opportunity. To the Minister of Finance: can you explain to Albertans how you plan to more than triple the heritage fund when your government continues to drag its feet by postponing the decision-making? When are we going to start saving this money?

Dr. Oberg: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, I will say that unfortunately the hon. member does not necessarily know exactly what he is

talking about. Currently, today, in the province of Alberta we have very close to \$36 billion in savings, \$36 billion in savings. Do we need to increase savings? Yes. I think it's a very laudable cause to increase savings and will provide security in the future, but what is actually happening today is that we have a committee that is taking a look at this exact question. Theoretically, we'll be submitting this report within the next two weeks.

Mr. Speaker, I am a fan of savings. I think it's great. I think it's savings for the future, and certainly you will be seeing more savings from this government.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 82 questions and responses today. We'll now return to the Routine.

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. the Premier I'm pleased to rise today to table the 2007 annual report for Alberta's Promise. In it are success stories from some of the more than 1,100 partnerships Alberta Promise helped to develop. Alberta Promise partnerships understand the need to invest in Alberta's future. As the annual report shows, these organizations, communities, and individuals have invested a total of \$139 million since Alberta's Promise was first established five years ago. Children and youth feel the impact of that investment and are being given more opportunities to grow into happy, healthy adults. As the province's future leaders and shapers their growth and development means building an Alberta with continued prosperity. The report is also available at www.albertaspromise.org. Thank you.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Two sets of tablings today. The first from Pauline Alakija, who is actually a physician working in Calgary who is writing to me with her grave concerns over the current proposals in Bill 41 giving the Minister of Health and Wellness power over the College of Physicians and Surgeons and other self-regulatory agencies.

The second tabling is actually a series of tablings, Mr. Speaker. I have letters from constituents Sidney George Langston, Charles Foster, Philip Allan Judge, Daniel Corriveau, Jason Galarneau, Al Southwell, Allan Mullholland, Brian Raymer, Michel Parisien, and Jake Armstrong, all of them with serious concerns about Alberta's current labour laws and asking for changes. I'll highlight today "one labour law for all unionized workers, so that Alberta labour law would treat all working people the same."

Thank you.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have four tablings today. The first is on behalf of a constituent of Edmonton-Gold Bar, Mr. Bernie Douglas, who is writing to my office expressing his strong view that "Alberta's labour laws require major changes to encourage fairness to all working people in Alberta."

The second letter that I have is from Mr. Orest Yakimishyn. He is also requesting that there be at least five significant changes to the labour laws in Alberta.

The third tabling is also from a constituent of Edmonton-Gold Bar, Mr. George Jurak, who is expressing his concern about the Alberta labour law and what he would like to see to have it changed.

My last tabling. It's a flyer, Mr. Speaker, called Kill Bill 46 Rally, which is going to occur tomorrow at noon sharp, Tuesday, November 27, on the steps here at the Alberta Legislative Building. This flyer is a what, when, where, why, and who.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling five copies of my letter and the cheque dated August 17 to the Coaldale food bank society. As per my pledge of April 2 half of my MLA indexed pay raise, \$146.25, is donated monthly to a food bank until AISH is similarly increased and indexed. The Coaldale food bank has 15 volunteers and helps 300 to 400 families yearly and is co-ordinated by Mr. Vaughn Caldwell.

My second tabling is five copies of a letter from a constituent, Doreen Brazier, in which she expresses her fear that if Bill 46 is passed, it will be at the expense of the basic democratic rights of the people and that for a bill to be retroactive is further infringement on those rights.

My third tabling I will table five copies of a letter from Marion Ellerman, who states that for some who need care, the change from long-term care to assisted daily living has been a huge mistake. People are needlessly suffering.

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two sets of tablings. One is a set of documents outlining the recommendations regarding the northeast Edmonton study area to the executive committee of the city of Edmonton. That looks to soil maps as smart investment and looking to get some of the value-added opportunities for northeast Edmonton.

The second is the program for local 955 of the operating engineers' 20-, 30-, 40-, and 50-year award recipients. There were over 200 this year. One of those of that 450,000 member organization was N. Budd Coutts, who rose to the secretary-treasurer position. He is from Stony Plain, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have five tablings, and they have come from my constituents. They are Aylene Reynolds, Susan Lumley, Gayla Boake, Diana Rickard, Parminder Singh Pannu. They are all concerned about Alberta labour laws and strongly believe in "major changes to encourage fairness to all working people," strongly urging this government to implement and support changes to our province's antiquated and unfair labour laws and "bring Alberta labour laws into the 21st Century."

Thank you.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of letters that I have received from 200 of my constituents, calling for changing Alberta's labour laws. The letters express strong support for such changes as first contract arbitration, full legal recognition of bargaining rights, and one organizing law for all unionized workers.

Thank you.

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table five copies of a letter I received from Joyce and Edward Tona, concerned parents of a child who has been a developmental client of Michener Centre in Red Deer. While they feel their daughter has received excellent care at the centre, their concerns are with the PDD board, that they believe seems more interested in moving the clients into group homes than in building on the success of the Michener Centre.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling five copies of a letter written by Jenny Hoops on behalf of Parents for Quality Child Care. The letter was written to the Minister of Children's Services, and in it she notes:

We applaud your continued efforts to improve the quality of child care in Alberta, however imposing higher standards without provincial or federal funding will likely cause availability to decline, worsening an already critical situation.

2:30

The Speaker: Hon. members, during Oral Question Period today a point of order was raised. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Point of Order Factual Accuracy

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again during an exchange between the Premier and the Leader of the Official Opposition during the beginning questions in question period today, the Premier indicated that the Official Opposition of Alberta had failed to produce a policy on the royalty review. Citing 23(h), 23(i), 23(j), *Beauchesne* 484(3), I think it's unbecoming for the Premier to pay so little attention to the briefing by his staff, or perhaps this is just stubbornness about not paying attention to tabled documents.

Essentially, this point of order was raised exactly the same 11 days ago, on the 15th of November. The documents have been tabled. The Premier under 23(h) is making an allegation that the opposition has no policy on this royalty review. In fact, on November 15 I tabled all those documents. They exist as sessional papers 789/2007, 790/2007, 791/2007, 792/2007, and 793/2007.

I'll even note that during the exchange on November 11, the Minister of Energy got into it and pointed out that he had asked the Official Opposition to express our opinion with respect to a royalty review. Two of the documents that I tabled on that day, Mr. Speaker, were in fact copies of the presentation that our shadow minister for Energy had made to that very same royalty review in response to the invitation from the Minister of Energy. We have repeatedly tabled that presentation to the royalty review itself as proof that we were there. We've tabled media releases and copies of two public speeches that were made prior, in fact, to when the government's response was released.

The Premier has spoken contrary to the fact and is continuing to do so. In doing that, under 23(l) he is creating a disorder. Under 484(3) the documents have been requested and have been tabled, Mr. Speaker. To continue to make statements otherwise is, I believe, to take *Beauchesne's* 494 off the table as a defence.

The Liberal policy on the royalty review is public. It is tabled. This point of order has been made before. I don't know why the Premier insists on repeating this. I hope that he listens to his staff, but clearly he's not willing to or not willing to pay attention to the documents that have been tabled in the House.

I would ask that the Premier withdraw the remarks today and to please not repeat them again because they are flat out inaccurate. To

continue to do so knowingly, Mr. Speaker, would certainly make me question why he continues to do that. I think he starts to move into a different area entirely.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A pile of paper, whether tabled as sessional documents or not, does not necessarily a policy make. As you pointed out in your ruling on this very same point of order a number of days ago, there are differences of opinion, and those differences of opinion happen all the time.

In fact, if the hon. member raising the point of order wishes to rule out or have a point of order on any misstatement or any difference of viewpoint raised by hon. members during question period in their first 45 seconds, when they harassed a minister of the government, saying, “You don’t have a policy in this,” or “Why don’t you care” when you do care – as my hon. colleague from Peace River indicated to me just now, that’s entirely a difference of opinion, a viewpoint, and has nothing to do with the fact.

The fact of whether there’s a policy or not is entirely in the eye of the beholder. What the Premier has referred to a number of times in this House and I think is irrefutable, actually, is that back in 2004 there was an election, and there was no evidence then and I don’t believe now – and I say it’s not policy; it’s a question of evidence – that the Leader of the Official Opposition or the opposition at all spoke about the need for a royalty review. There’s no evidence that I’ve been able to discern – and I have it on reliable authority from others who have taken the time to look – that the Leader of the Opposition spoke between that time and earlier this year with respect to the need for a royalty review.

In fact, it was this Premier, this leader of the party that now is in government, his initiative which brought forward the royalty review. He first spoke about it during the leadership process a year ago and then followed through on the commitment that he made earlier this year, at which time the position of the Official Opposition, it would seem – and I stand to be corrected – was that the royalty panel that was appointed was not going to be able to do the job because it was somehow bitter and twisted.

Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is that when the Premier was referring this afternoon – and I don’t have the Blues in front of me – he clearly was making a statement of opinion. It’s not something that he needs to be asked to withdraw. His opinion is his opinion and, in fact, probably is shared by most government members of the House, that the Liberals have no policy in this area. [interjection]

The Speaker: Hon. Official Opposition House Leader, in response to your last question, which was, “Mr. Speaker, how long will this go on?” that will depend entirely on the members. As long as the members want to raise questions with preambles and give answers that respond in kind and pretty much test the line in terms of debate all the time, it’s going to go on forever. This is not going to stop. Without any doubt one of the privileges that members have in this House is to express positions that they believe in. Whether or not other members agree with them is secondary to the fact that they have an opportunity to make a statement.

Oftentimes I’ve sat here and I’ve listened to members saying: the government doesn’t know what it’s doing. Then a government minister gets up and says: oh, yes, we do know what we’re doing. That’s part of the debate. So if somebody says, “We have a policy,” and somebody else says, “No, you don’t have a policy,” that’s part of the whole problem of the exchange in the debate with respect to

this. You know, we’re governed basically by *Beauchesne*, paragraph 494, which is relevant. It basically says that statements by members respecting themselves and within their own knowledge must be accepted. Oftentimes we will have a difference of opinion with respect to that, and oftentimes we’ll have to deal with two versions of the same thing and accept both of them.

There’s one last point that I do want to raise with respect to this, and that is a quote from Rules of Order and Decorum, page 541: “A Member may not direct remarks to the House or engage in debate by raising a matter under the guise of a point of order.” In essence, what we’ve got here is another extension of an opportunity to continue debate and clarification under the guise of a point of order. The statement that was made by the Premier at this point:

Mr. Speaker, his plan for infrastructure in this province is probably similar to the position they took on the royalty framework, which is zip. They don’t know where they are. It must get pretty difficult sitting on the fence all the time.

The chair is absolutely, totally neutral on the words involved, but the chair recognizes that if one looks at other questions and looks at other responses, this is not abnormal at all. It’s part of the ongoing debate, where “That minister is doing a lousy job,” and then the minister gets up and says, “Well, I’m doing a wonderful job” and proves it. I don’t know how you deal with this. As long as we have our preambles and as long as we have other statements and we’re always on the edge of this, this is going to continue forever.

There’s no point of order.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Written Questions**

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that written questions on the Order Paper stand and retain their places.

[Motion carried]

head: **Motions for Returns**

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that motions for returns on the Order Paper stand and retain their places.

[Motion carried]

head: 2:40 **Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole**

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we’ll call the committee to order.

Bill 212 Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? Hon. members, we are currently dealing with an amendment, amendment A1.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Speaking to A1 of Bill 212, Safer Commu-

nities and Neighbourhoods Act, I had an opportunity to present to the task force that toured the province. I had an opportunity to present at the University of Calgary and then at sort of a follow-up in northeast Calgary, and at the follow-up in northeast Calgary a number of the suggestions I had made were in evidence by virtue of the Hobbema cadets.

The Hobbema cadets showed what positive interaction can take place when students and youth are involved in proactive, preventative measures. The members of the Hobbema cadets were trained by an RCMP individual, and they had such pride not only in their discipline but in their uniforms, and they were very supportive of each other. The precision with which they went through their parade and drills showed the type of pride that young people experience when adults take into account their willingness to do things right. As a teacher for 34 years I have seen the value of preventative and proactive programs such as school resource officers, and that's why in amendment A1 the notion of being proactive and preventative is so very important.

In order to achieve safer communities and neighbourhoods such as Bill 212 purports and amendment A1 attests to, we have to deal with problems of the cause of crime. These problems include such things as food insecurity. I noted that 85 per cent of families that are receiving benefits from the province, whether those benefits are through AISH or PDD or community living or through welfare, are more likely to experience food insecurity. If they can't receive the food in supportive, subsidized fashion, then they're forced to look otherwise, and sometimes crimes occur out of desperation, when food is shoplifted.

Poverty affects a growing number of individuals. Amendment A1 of Bill 212, Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act, takes into account that factors such as poverty, such as homelessness are ever present in our province despite its boom circumstance. As I've noted before, so many of the factors that we are experiencing now are more likely to be experienced during a depression than in a boom time.

We know, for example, that one of the contributing factors to crime is illiteracy. Unfortunately, 40 per cent of Albertans in the workforce are workplace illiterate. That lack of literacy shows up in a large proportion in our jail system. We have an awful lot of individuals who are incarcerated who are drug dependent, who suffer from infant fetal alcohol syndrome, which is carried through their lives.

As a teacher I have noted the disenfranchisement, the lack of connection with ESL students, 75 per cent of whom fail to complete their high school education within a three- or four-year period. We know that, unfortunately, there are a number of young immigrants who get drawn into the gangs because they're not receiving the support that Bill 212, Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act, purports to provide.

So in speaking in favour of amendment A1, it is important that in trying to achieve safer communities and neighbourhoods, youth and support for youth and parents of youth be taken into account. If we want to prevent crime in the future, we have to deal with the problems of poverty, food insecurity, illiteracy, that are, unfortunately, ever current in the present.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Cheffins: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I also rise to speak in favour of amendment A1 of the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act and to add my views to my hon. colleague from Calgary-Varsity with regard to the root causes that this bill purports to

address. I know from experience and working with the not-for-profit sector, as my colleague knows from his experience working in the education sector, that these root causes are and should be of concern to Albertans, particularly in this day and age with the economic climate that we face and the growing gap between the well-to-do and the not well-to-do in this province. It's like a magnifying glass that these boom times provide for us on all of that and all of those issues and all those items that are out there in our communities, and we need to be aware of them.

I know from speaking with people in the not-for-profit sector, with the Elizabeth Fry Society and the Calgary John Howard Society, for example, and other organizations that attempt to address these concerns, that we do need to address these in bills such as Bill 212, Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act, and particularly with regard to amendment A1.

Illiteracy is something that, again, is recognized by people who are involved in the education system, recognizing that there are people seeing it, particularly those trying to get a foothold in the workforce and how difficult that is. Of course, we're all pleased when those people have the courage to bring those issues forward. It's an issue that people want to often see . . .

2:50

Ms Evans: I am sorry, but am I to understand that the hon. member's microphone might not be working?

The Deputy Chair: To the people who are managing the microphone system, it appears that we have low volume on this particular mike, if that can be attended to, please.

Hon. member, you may proceed.

Mr. Cheffins: Okay. I'll try to raise my voice a little bit for the sake of the members in the Assembly.

As I mentioned, I do wish to raise my voice also in conjunction with my colleague from Calgary-Varsity with regard to the roots of crime and the need to address those in Alberta. My colleagues mentioned literacy and the attempts, that we need to address those through the education system, and mental health issues. Again, in the not-for-profit sector, where I have experience, we're very well aware of the number of people who are incarcerated who suffer from mental health issues. We need to address those. Hopefully, we'll be able to come to some of those through Bill 212 and this amendment A1.

My colleagues also mentioned poverty concerns in this province. Again, what I was trying to say, and perhaps what I need to speak up a little bit more about, perhaps what we all need to speak up a little bit more about, is the growing gap between the well-to-do and those who aren't well-to-do in this province and how that gap is magnified in times of a boom. We need to address those issues because food issues are of concern, the percentage of crimes that are committed that have to do with people trying to find some desperate way to be able to address their basic needs.

Just one issue I'd like to raise in conjunction with this is what it is that I hear from the Elizabeth Fry Society, and that has to do with the percentage of crimes that are committed by females in this province and have to do with trying to provide basic needs for themselves and their families. Frankly, this is a travesty in a province with the resources that we have. It should be a concern to all Albertans that people are falling through the cracks here in Alberta.

Again, I rise in support of Bill 212 and encourage this Assembly to consider addressing those issues in whatever manner possible, including through amendment A1. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed, followed by St. Albert.

Mr. Rodney: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to rise and contribute to the Committee of the Whole debate for Bill 212, the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act. I'd like to start by commending the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays for bringing this legislation forward. I certainly believe that the possibility of changed safety levels in our communities for the better is definitely inherent in this bill.

I'd like to speak to that, the intent of the bill, and the amendment proposed for it. Generally, the aim of the bill is to make Alberta's communities safer by decreasing the prevalence of hazardous and disruptive activities within our neighbourhoods. The proposed act would accomplish this by empowering community members who observe events which negatively impact on their health or security. The situations that one should report are occurring are outlined in section 3 of the bill. Perhaps we can all agree that having an informed citizenry contributing directly to the safety of communities, as outlined in this section, is arguably the best method of crime reduction and prevention.

The bill also provides an additional avenue for community members, no matter where they live, to make a complaint to a special law enforcement agency. They can do so if their neighbourhood is adversely affected by activities on a property in a community.

I'd like to add briefly that proposed amendments B, J, and Q all enhance the intent of this bill. They do so by making it possible to include all mobile homes, even those on rented lots, under the scope of this bill. This would be a commendable change as it reinforces the fact that Bill 212 is aimed at the safety of all communities in Alberta: urban and rural, north and south.

Mr. Chairman, the enforcement agency under Bill 212 is different from the current resources available because it would be dedicated to the investigation of specified disruptive behaviour. Therefore, it would have the capacity to perform larger, in-depth investigations into citizens' concerns.

The information needed for these investigations must be made available while respecting the rights of the person being investigated. Proposed amendment F solidifies these aspects of the bill and would go a long way in ensuring that both sides of the equation are addressed appropriately.

This is also a different type of legislation because it targets behaviours on public and private properties. This proposed act places attention on the property that facilitates the questionable behaviour whereas the current focus is frequently placed on the individual and the crime. Under this bill, however, individuals who engage in dangerous activities in a private residence could be evicted from the residence if they rent or be barred from the property for a period of time if they own it. In any event the property could be closed over a certain time frame specified by the Court of Queen's Bench. By supporting amendments C and H, for example, we can ensure these caveats or interests that are placed on the property's land title will be appropriately assigned and in line with Alberta's legal and land systems.

The idea behind the bill is twofold. First, it gives residents an increased role by providing them with access to the resources needed to end activities which adversely affect their quality of life. Second, by closing the property where these activities are occurring, all individuals involved are basically removed from the community. Their ability to conduct the activity would be curtailed because they would simply not have a location to do it in.

Bill 212 makes a link between property and dangerous activity. Inherent in this legislation, Mr. Chairman, is the assumption that by

taking away a person's access to their property, we can impair their ability to commit unwanted acts. I think that committing a crime or a nuisance act is more than just a matter of personal choice. Even if someone willfully chooses to engage in an activity that could cause harm to others, an appropriate environment is also needed. If a criminal knows he or she may be caught and lose their residence, they may not follow through after all. I think that poor intentions can in some cases be rectified when opportunity is taken away and more consequences are put in line.

The Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act goes further than that, Mr. Chairman. Once a legitimate complaint is received, the wrongdoers are given a chance to clean up their act before the property is targeted. After a complaint or a concern from a community member is received, the agency has the option to approach the situation in a variety of community-based ways. For example, as per section 4(1)(c) a warning letter may be sent to the owner of the property or its occupant. The letter could go a long way in informing the landlord of what's happening on the property, and perhaps after receiving that kind of information, the landlord could and would take action to eliminate the problem-causing behaviour.

Furthermore, the agency can try to resolve the complaint by agreement or informal action as outlined in section 4(1)(d). This is where the idea of a community-based approach may help the situation before it gets exacerbated. In some cases the disruptive activities can be solved by calling for further involvement from a parent. In many situations a warning can address the problem when a disruptive behaviour is in its initial stage.

In other jurisdictions, Mr. Chairman, this approach has worked very successfully. It's been found that individuals who are just heading off the track usually get scared straight with this type of warning. The problem is identified and addressed before it turns into a larger issue. This proposed act is effective at preventing activity because it rectifies the situation before it has the chance to get worse. It is more preventative than some other legislation. It sends the message that this kind of behaviour is not acceptable, is not wanted in our neighbourhoods, and that wrongdoers can't get away with it, because the whole community is alert and engaged.

Activities can be dissuaded with avenues other than the criminal justice system. There is no question of actions that are still to be dealt with under the Criminal Code, but Bill 212 attempts to resolve issues before they need to be dealt with through the Criminal Code.

Mr. Chairman, part 2 of Bill 212 aims to implement a process by which dangerous and excessive fortifications on a property can be forcibly removed. The rationale behind this provision is that excessive fortifications are associated with increased levels of dangerous activity. There are very few legitimate reasons why homes in our communities require bulletproof windows or metal cladding on their exteriors. It's my belief that if these fortified buildings are allowed in our communities, they may pose a threat to the safety of others in our communities by endangering the lives of police officers and emergency response workers amongst others.

3:00

If I may, Mr. Chairman, I'd like to digress just a little and comment on a few style and grammar changes included in the amendments that are before the committee. Much like the fortified properties this bill seeks out to avoid future danger to the community, errors in language can cause problems down the road for legislation, and many of the amendments brought forward by the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays clear up some of these linguistic issues. The proposed amendments given as D and P clear up style inconsistencies, amendment G is a grammatical revision, it appears that amendments N and O are simply correcting cross-referencing errors, the amendment listed as R is reflecting a terminology change,

and all of these proposed amendments will help this legislation in the long run.

In closing, Mr. Chairman, I want to reiterate my admiration for the intent of the member. The safety of all Alberta communities is of paramount importance to me and, I'm sure, for all members. I ask my colleagues to lend support to this bill and the proposed amendments as well.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I also would like to support this document as worthy and compliment the member from Calgary for doing a job on this. He talks about one of the highlights of the bill. Looking at it, it promotes community safety by providing a mechanism for the government of Alberta to respond to public complaints about property.

I would like to take the word "property" out and use the words "community issues relative to crime" that are faced in the particular neighbourhood. For example, it would be worth while considering if I could lobby with the member to put functions such as property under the function of the safer communities and neighbourhood committee: say, in St. Albert put the property matter in there – curfews, drugs, community policing, youth – so that the function could be identified throughout the community as all under that particular heading, and people would be less confused and know where to go for one-stop shopping relative to their concerns.

Now, obviously, if you set this up with a board like an FCSS board, you would have to have some incentive funding. I think it would be worth pursuing that, broadening your scope from a property to a larger number of matters that are under the umbrella of crime. I think there would be some merit in doing that. I think this has a lot of merit.

One of the things that I would even put under a committee of this type is community policing. It's interesting that in my particular part of St. Albert where I have an office, the main core of St. Albert, I have obviously not seen a policeman over the last three years visit our office. I see them going by in police cars and stopping me on the highway once in a while. I'm suggesting to you that I think under a safer communities and neighbourhood structure you would get some co-ordination of this service. That's where I'd like to see this broaden up from just a property aspect to a more total picture of the crime issues in a particular community, and I think it would have a lot of merit.

I want to emphasize that I do support this. I think it has a lot of merit. I think with a few changes it would even make it more worth while for communities such as ours in St. Albert to follow this through and follow the model of the FCSS board in making this effective. It would cost them money, yes, to set it up, but I think it would be worthy, and it has a lot of possibilities.

I'll stop with that, Mr. Chair, and thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. Member for Calgary-Hays, we have about four minutes.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's a pleasure to rise again and speak during Committee of the Whole for Bill 212, the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act. I would like to take some time to address the various points which were brought up in the debate up to this point.

The hon. members for Edmonton-Mill Woods and Lethbridge-East asked for more information about who exactly the individual

acting as a director would be. As was stated during the second reading debate, the director plays a significant role in the execution of the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act. The director or the individual acting as director must deal with and initiate many of the mechanisms set out under Bill 212. This includes receiving and acting on complaints from Albertans, collecting information, applying for and serving community safety orders, closing properties, registering caveats based on a community safety order, and at times asking residents to vacate properties.

Under the Police Act the director of law enforcement has a number of important responsibilities. Among many other duties the director is mandated to monitor police services to ensure that adequate and effective policing is maintained throughout the province. Furthermore, this individual develops and promotes crime prevention and restorative justice programs and works to enhance professional practices, standards, and training for police services.

Amendment A will allow the director of law enforcement to delegate the day-to-day operational and administrative functions to a qualified member of the department under the purview of the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. This will provide the most effective use of staff to ensure that front-line resources assigned to this important initiative are responding to the needs of Alberta's communities.

Mr. Chairman, the Member for Lethbridge-East also wanted further clarification on how local police services would interact with the agencies proposed by Bill 212. As I explained previously, in other jurisdictions these two agencies are distinct but work co-operatively. For example, as of October 31, 2007, Nova Scotia's public safety investigation section had 37 active and ongoing investigations throughout the province and had completed 68 investigations since it became operational in April 2007. Thirteen of those investigations were concluded through co-operation with other Nova Scotia agencies. In those cases the public safety investigation section responded to requests from police services for technical assistance.

More specifically, in October 2007 the public safety investigation section teamed up with the members of the Cape Breton regional police for the investigation of a property. At the beginning of that month the police conducted a warrant search of the property and seized marijuana, hashish, LSD, and other drugs. The tenant of the property was charged with drug trafficking and firearms offences as a result of the police investigation.

The Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act investigation established that illegal drug activities taking place at or near this property were having an adverse effect on this particular neighbourhood. The problem tenant was subsequently issued a Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act notice to vacate the premise. By the end of the month the tenant voluntarily complied and vacated the premise.

Fostering strong working relationships and partnerships with other law enforcement agencies is a strategic priority for other jurisdictions' safer communities and neighbourhood agencies. They provide both investigative and technical resources to a growing number of police agencies while maintaining a focus on their specified public safety mandate. Clearly, there are open communication lines between both agencies to ensure that safer communities and neighbourhoods investigators do not interfere with the investigations already in progress by police.

Mr. Chairman, if I may, I would also like to respond to the concerned voice by the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona regarding the Privacy Commissioner's news release on November 7, 2007. The information the Privacy Commissioner stated that overriding the

Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act in Bill 212 is not necessary. Because it is imperative that a complainant's personal information remain absolutely confidential during this process, Bill 212 contains a provision which states that the identity of the complainant is to be confidential and cannot be disclosed without the written consent of the person in question.

Please allow me to clarify why this is the case. Section 30(2) ensures that the complainant's privacy rights are clearly established. Having all of the privacy expectations actually within the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act provides for the direct protection of privacy. This section simplifies any possible confusion about complainants' privacy. Bill 212 was fuelled by the observations of Albertans, their privacy of the utmost importance.

3:10

The Deputy Chair: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays, but under Standing Order 8(7)(a)(ii) and 8(7)(b), which state that all questions must be decided to conclude debate on a private member's public bill which has received 120 minutes of debate in Committee of the Whole, I must now put the questions to conclude debate.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

[The clauses of Bill 212 as amended agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Hon. Deputy Government House Leader, I now request you to move that the committee rise and report Bill 212.

Mr. Renner: All right. I will. I move that we rise and report Bill 212.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports the following bill with some amendments: Bill 212. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

head: **Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading**

**Bill 214
Healthy Futures Act**

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am thrilled and pleased to be able to move second reading of Bill 214, the Healthy Futures Act.

I've been in this Assembly for 11 years – this is my 11th fall sitting – and I'm trying to remember if I've ever actually managed to get a bill into debate. This could be my first time, so I really am delighted. Thank you.

This bill has excellent genealogy. It, in fact, comes directly flowing from the famous red book put out by the Liberal opposition, which is our plan for public health care called Creating a Healthy Future, made famous in this Assembly by the previous Premier, who made it into an airborne missive and had to withdraw that and apologize for it.

I can refer people to page 23 of that document for anyone that would like to read further the policy document that we produced that has resulted now in Bill 214. This is our policy position number one, which is to "require major policies and funding decisions to undergo 'Health Impact Assessments'." Essentially, many of the important factors in determining our health really have very little to do with the health care system, but they have an awful lot to do with lifestyle choices, injury prevention, the environment, et cetera. That is what we are trying to capture in this bill, that the government would adopt a policy of doing health impact assessments when they were considering either licensing or giving approval for large projects or looking at funding large projects.

I don't have to think very hard to come up with a number of situations that we are looking at in Alberta where a health impact assessment could be put into play, I think for very good effect; for example, the situation that we have in Fort McMurray and north of Fort McMurray and the situation soon to come in Strathcona county with the upgraders, what they call Upgrader Alley. Even a little further east from there is the new coal mine that's being opened up in the Dodds/Round Hill area. Or even I'm thinking back to the work that I did around the Turner Valley gas plant and trying to make that into a historical public heritage site and the problems they've had there with the ongoing leakage from the plant into nearby water sources and trying to test for that and get to the bottom of it. So there are just a couple of ideas of where a health impact assessment would be useful to have in place to help inform our decisions.

I think there's a fairly wide range that the bill would take into consideration.

The purpose of the health assessment process is

- (a) to support the goals of prevention and sustainable development and wellness,
- (b) to create and update, in the monitoring and audit stages of assessment, a body of information about health determinants and the impact of certain activities on health,
- (c) to predict the health consequences of a proposed activity and to assess plans to mitigate any negative health impacts resulting from [that] activity, and
- (d) to provide for the involvement of the public, proponents, the Government and Government agencies in the review of [those same] proposed activities.

We're suggesting that there would be a director of assessment review put in place, who could then oversee and administer these reviews, and there would be a screening committee, as well, that worked hand in hand. Proposed activities for the director of the assessment review are: a description of the proposed activity; an analysis of the need for it; consideration of alternatives to the proposed activity; identification of potentially affected populations, including residents, workers, vulnerable populations, and other identifiable groups; an analysis of site selection; identification of

existing health status of the population that might be affected; an analysis of possible effects on sociocultural well-being, et cetera. The list goes on. I encourage people to actually read the bill on this.

Certainly, one of the things that I have really come to understand as the Official Opposition shadow minister for Health and Wellness is how important those social determinants of health are. I started out by saying that a lot of the factors in determining our health really have very little to do with the health care system. Well, the social determinants of health take into consideration things like income, economic status, social equity, education, the environment, family life and community support, social stresses, job security.

I think one of the things that we find really important when we look at this policy of health impact assessments is agriculture and food production. If we're going to protect our food sources and also the farm workers that work with it, we've got to be very conscious of what we're putting into the air, the water, and the soil that they, then, have to work with. I argue all the way through this that it doesn't get us further ahead if we end up with massive development and a sick population or massive development and we've poisoned our land.

You know, I'm not saying that that's imminent, I'm not saying the sky is going to fall, but I am saying that we've reached a point where the level of our development gets larger and larger and larger. Who would have comprehended 50 years ago the kind of development that we are now looking at in Fort McMurray? Who would have contemplated work camps of 5,000 to 6,000 people, and not just one, Mr. Speaker, but many, many, many work camps with that many people in them supporting a number of different developments in that area? [interjection] Someone from across the way is saying that, oh, they knew about it 50 years ago, which frankly is making the member older than I thought he was. That was an interesting thing to learn today.

The World Health Organization supports the use of health impact assessments. From their point of view, they say that it's based on four values, and these values provide a platform from which the benefits of a health impact assessment can be derived and link health impact assessments to the policy environment in which the assessments are being undertaken: democracy, which allows people to participate in the development and implementation; equity, because it's examining the distribution of impacts from a proposal on the whole population, not just on the people that are going to expend the money or make the money but on everybody that's around it, and I think that's really important; sustainable development, which we with limited natural resources in this province really, you know, understand we need to get a handle on, but those short- and long-term impacts have to be considered for sustainable development; ethical use of evidence. I really believe in evidence-based decision-making using the best available quantitative and qualitative evidence to be identified and used in assessment.

3:20

That's coming out of the World Health Organization. Clearly we're not the only ones who are anticipating this, but the Liberal opposition issued our policy paper in 2003. That's when we came out with this recommendation. It's taken me this long to get a bill drawn to be able to actually transform that idea into what you see before you as Bill 214, but I think that those concepts that are behind this bill are very important. We are in second reading of Bill 214, so I am generally speaking about the principles of the bill, but that is what is behind it.

I've mentioned some of the places where I think it would be useful when we're just looking at current development proposals that are in front of us, like Upgrader Alley and Fort McMurray and some

of those other areas. But, very quickly, when I go through and look at some of the newspaper articles that have been done around problems that have cropped up, you think we should be able to see this.

Mr. Ouellette: I was daydreaming. Sorry.

Ms Blakeman: Oh, boy. Yeah, you are. Might want to put that cellphone on vibrate.

I think this is a very exciting opportunity for this Assembly. I know a number of times in the past the government has stolen our ideas. I'm happy to have that happen with this bill.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to speak to Bill 214, the Healthy Futures Act. This act proposes that any major government project or legislative proposal be assessed for how it may potentially affect a myriad of factors, including income, poverty, social equity, education, environment, family life, social stress, job security, and agriculture and food production.

Mr. Speaker, one of my main concerns with this bill is that it could effectively bring the decision-making apparatus of the government and this Assembly to a grinding halt. There's a long list of government departments that are mandated to address the factors in this bill. Income, poverty, and social equity involve at the very least Finance and Service Alberta. Social equity, family life, and social stress are topics covered by Children's Services, Health and Wellness, Municipal Affairs and Housing, and Seniors and Community Supports. Our education system involves Education and Advanced Education and Technology while Environment consists of not only the Department of Environment but also Sustainable Resource Development and Energy. Agriculture and Food is obviously affected by the inclusion of agriculture and food production in this bill. This means that at the very least the operations of 13 of the government's 18 ministries, more than two-thirds, would be interrupted by this bill.

There's nothing necessarily wrong with a bill that would affect a lot of ministries, but this bill goes much too far, Mr. Speaker. The problem is not that the idea of health assessments is a bad one; it's that the mechanism this bill proposes to implement is simply unacceptable. There's no doubt there are numerous factors that contribute to human health. The question for this government is whether these factors can be studied in the manner that this bill proposes and still be timely and economical with respect to legislative decision-making.

Now, when I consider the study mechanism proposed in Bill 214, I think the clear answer to that question is no. First, the bill does not propose a mechanism that would work in a timely manner. Depending on the scope of the proposed changes or project, developing, carrying out, and analyzing the results of a study could take months or even years. In addition, making these health assessments available for public review before legislation is approved would require at least several weeks in the Legislature to ensure there is adequate time for public input. It seems that, in the end, the mechanism proposed by this bill adds unnecessary bureaucracy and duplication.

I also wonder whether the Member for Edmonton-Centre considered time constraints when Bill 214 was prepared. I think most members of this House would agree that the process to pass laws is already quite lengthy. It's hard to justify extending the process to accommodate the assessments proposed in the bill.

Second, Bill 214 does not propose a mechanism that will work in

an economical manner. There have been many studies done by Health Canada, the World Health Organization, and other respected health groups to determine how health impact assessments might best be implemented. Many of these studies suggest including health impacts in the environmental assessment process, in part because there's really no need to conduct two separate assessments and pay for similar assessments twice. As MLAs we require information on a broad range of issues when we assess policies or projects. At the very least, we look at how a proposal would affect Alberta's economy, our environment, and our citizens' health. To do this, we need information on each of these concerns at once, not only information about health to the exclusion of other issues. Why assess health separately from other issues when often the concerns involved are common to all of them?

The third question I have about the mechanism proposed in Bill 214 is whether these health assessments would provide additional information that allows me and others to better make decisions. I don't believe that they would. The problem here is that assessing health effects is nowhere near as straightforward as the bill may suggest. It's very easy, for example, to develop toxicological information about the effects of a specific chemical, to say that exposure to so many parts per million has a particular effect over a certain amount of time, but even very specific information like this is difficult to use. Most people are exposed to mixtures of substances. Another related problem is that there are only risk assessments for a few effects on physical health, particularly cancer. There are few ways to assess other physical health effects or effects on psychological and social well-being.

In short, mandating the study of health effects is absolutely useless if there's no systematic and scientifically agreed upon way to conduct those studies. In some situations health assessments may be scientifically possible and legislatively advisable and worthwhile given their potential effects. In those situations I don't see anything wrong with conducting such assessments, but that's not what this bill proposes. It would have us study legislation without regard to the need for such study or the costs and time required, not to mention whether it actually produces meaningful or useful information.

For the purposes of this debate, Mr. Speaker, let's assume for a moment that all of these issues I just listed are not concerns. The question about health assessments then becomes: who's going to conduct these assessments? It's clear that they're not the sort of thing to be undertaken lightly or by a layperson. Like so many health care issues, we need health professionals to perform these studies. Yet I hardly think I need to remind anyone in this House that Alberta is looking around the world for more health professionals. Doctors, epidemiologists, and public health experts, just to name a few: they're not easy to come by within our borders or beyond. Where would we find these professionals to carry out these studies? Should we divert health professionals already working in Alberta from their current excellent efforts to carry out health impact assessments? I don't think so.

The core issue in this debate is whether the positive effects of this bill would outweigh the negative effects, resulting in better legislative decision-making. I think it's clear that the negative effects outweigh the positive, no matter whether we're discussing time or money involved or the information that these studies would produce.

Health is not the only issue that must be taken into consideration when public policy is made. To give an obvious example, as MLAs we must also consider the impact that a given measure will have on the public purse. Moreover, it's not as though our present policy-making process has failed to consider health. These processes do so with far less expense and in far less time than this bill would require.

There's simply no justification for enacting a process that would effectively halt the legislative process for at least 13 of the government's 18 ministries.

Having given careful consideration to the Healthy Futures Act, I'm opposed to the passage of the bill and I encourage my colleagues to join me in opposing it. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

3:30

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by Calgary-Varsity, followed by Calgary-Egmont.

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A few comments on Bill 214, the Healthy Futures Act. I certainly commend the author for the intent of what was attempted here, to establish a health assessment screening committee of each ministry, the Health Quality Council of Alberta, and an expert in preventative health. I certainly understand the reason for this. We know from just the simple things about health, you know, the hospitals, what we tend to spend most of our time on, that in the long run we really want to deal with health in a much different way. We all agree with that, or at least I hope we all agree from time to time.

I'd certainly be prepared to take a look at this health assessment screening committee, but I tend to feel it might be more of a bureaucracy. I mean, I think we know right away, but we want to get some action. When I look today, we talk about the social determinants of health care. We know, for instance, by where you live and by the amount of income coming into your family that the chances you're going to have health problems increase dramatically. We know all these things, Mr. Speaker. I think what we need is some mechanism for action. Now, if this could do that, I certainly would be quite prepared to support it. I'd have to see how it looks, not just to set up a screening device with things we know that we should be doing immediately. Maybe it would be helpful in some environmental areas, you know, where we're looking at toxins and what they might mean, Fort Chipewyan perhaps being an example of where something like this might have worked.

You know, when I look today just at poverty – and it was alluded to in this Assembly earlier on in question period – when we see that 64,000 Alberta children are impoverished and the working poor in this rich province topped the national average, well, I can tell you right there that down the way we're going to have some health problems. Rather than a screening mechanism I would like to see how we could begin to bring these kids out of poverty. Of course, they're coming from poorer families. Many of these families are working in this rich province. How do we deal with that? How do we deal with the minimum wage and all the things that we need to do, Mr. Speaker? How do we deal with housing? All these are the issues that we need to deal with immediately. I don't think in this case that we need a screening device to know that we have to do some things to deal with poverty. It's self-evident. The evidence is clear that, again, depending on where you live and what your income is, chances are that you're going to have problems with the health care system in the future. That's self-evident. So what are we doing to start to eliminate poverty?

It reminds me of a 10-year plan back in 1989 to get rid of homelessness federally. We were going to end child poverty federally. It was brought in by Ed Broadbent. Now, we haven't made a dent in that, but we know that we should be dealing with that, Mr. Speaker. It's self-evident. But if there's no political will to do these things, it doesn't matter how many screening devices you have.

Mr. Speaker, as I say, certainly, it's an interesting idea. I would rather see, I guess, action in dealing with some of these issues –

environment, housing, education, all the things that we know have an impact on health – and I don't think we need a screening device to do that. Now, if this could move this ahead somehow, if I could be shown that it's not just, you know, another bureaucracy that we deal with, I certainly would be open to looking at how this might work. Of course, this is very hard to explain in the bill. I understand that. But one must take a look at it and say: well, it looks a little bureaucratic on the procedure when we know some of the things that we have to move on. We have a disagreement with the government about this. They tell us, say, with housing: everything is hunky-dory; we're moving along; there aren't any problems there. Well, it doesn't matter how many screening devices. If they take that attitude in government, they're not going to move whether they have a screening device or not.

As I say, with those few comments, Mr. Speaker, I really would tend to think that there might be some things that might work in this bill, like green screens, for example, especially dealing with the environment. That's probably where something like this might be of some use, which obviously leads to health problems, you know, if we don't have those types of screens. I think the member was right in saying that a lot of things 20 years ago that we took for granted and we didn't think were health problems we now know. Maybe something like this, especially in that area, might have some bearing, that we would not make those mistakes with our younger people in the future down the way. So I guess I'm prepared to take a look at it. I'm worried about the bureaucracy, but there may be some use for this in certain areas.

Thank you very much for the time.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by Calgary-Egmont, followed by St. Albert.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased that the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview is willing to take a look at Bill 214. That's the whole point of why we're here in the Legislature.

I very much appreciate the fact that government members took a look at my Motion 511 on establishing a unified family court. To make it more palatable and potentially to make it more implementable, the amendment was changed to implement a unified family court process.

The government in its wisdom established a series of standing policy committees so that bills could receive the scrutiny of sober second, third, fourth, and fifth thought. What I am suggesting is that we have a number of opportunities. When we have the Committee of the Whole process on Bill 214, the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview might wish to introduce an amendment which he feels would help to establish the clarity of the process in terms of creating the assessment. Likewise, the Member for Calgary-Lougheed, who believes at this point that this bill appears to have high precepts, imports, and intents. If he doesn't believe in his wisdom that it has the mechanisms necessary to actually achieve accomplishment, then I would suggest that, both in the process of Committee of the Whole or potentially as a referral. The ideas that Bill 214, the Healthy Futures Act, puts forward I very strongly support and would like to see implemented. If, using the wisdom of the House as a whole, we can turn the concepts and the details into actual effect, then we'll have achieved a terrific result for Alberta.

For too long we've been flying by the seat of our pants in this province. We have taken the good fortune of the nonrenewable resources, and we've extracted them at rapid paces, which has had some negative effects. A former member of this House was very fond of expressing one of the primary laws of physics, which is that for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. What has

happened in this province is that while we've enjoyed the wealth associated with harvesting our nonrenewables – gas, oil, the bitumen from the oil sands – it comes at a cost. What Bill 214 is suggesting is that before you undertake a development, let's do a cumulative assessment of the effect that that development is going to have. Is the amount of effort, time, money, and the process going to achieve the results that were intended? Can wealth end up buying happiness, or by sacrificing a significant part of our environment, are there going to be repercussions and ramifications that highly outweigh the intent of the project?

3:40

Now, we have this wonderful asset north of Fort McMurray in terms of the oil sands, but there are limitations to the aquifers that underlie that area. There are limitations to the Athabasca River. We have, through various studies, noted that there is arsenic and there is mercury. We have known that the amount of water that is contained in the Athabasca is going down. Of course, with any of that water that gets used in the refining process, whether it be in an upgrader in the corridor in central Alberta or whether it be in the oil sands itself, we have to know what that effect is. We cannot blindly go forward. Another statement is that if we don't learn from the mistakes of the past, we're doomed to repeat them. Bill 214, the Healthy Futures Act, says: hey, before we go ahead, let's think this out. I would suggest that the time taken in thinking it out is a worthy investment.

In the urban areas we are encroaching on wells that were drilled in years previous. The most significant example of that was the proposed Compton well within a kilometre of the southeast hospital. Compton argued that the chances of a blowout of that particular well given modern technology and the pilot light and that as soon as the gas is leaked, it's immediately ignited – well, the Compton individual associated with that Energy and Utilities Board hearing suggested that the chances of a well blowout were the square root of zero. Yes, that's rhetoric, and, yes, that's hyperbole. He was trying to assure the 350,000 residents in the southeast area of Calgary, one-third of our population, that there was nothing to worry about. Fortunately, through the process and through the intervention of the city of Calgary and the Calgary health region, that well site was not allowed to go ahead. It was a lengthy process, but if lives can be saved, then that has to be taken into account.

We've had examples where because of a lack of due diligence, projects were allowed to go ahead; for example, the Lynnview Ridge project in Calgary, which was built on top of an old refinery site. We've had examples of trying to build greenhouses on former oil sites, thinking that there wouldn't be any problem with doing so. We just needed the space, so put the greenhouse in that area. The effect of what was coming up from the ground, whether it be creosote along the Bow River or, as I say, chemicals in the ground: these things weren't taken into account when all these homes were built in Lynnview Ridge.

The fact that the city had surrounded the Hub Oil recycling plant wasn't really taken into account when approval was given to carry out the type of recycling work that was done. Unfortunately, two individuals lost their lives when that event took place. We have examples. Turner Valley and Black Diamond, for example, have expressed desires potentially to amalgamate, but that area is a pincushion of early development. The good folks in Turner Valley have had to redesign, redraw their plan for their water reservoir twice, at great cost to the town of Turner Valley. Initially the locations of well sites weren't taken into account, and when it turned out that there was a well site smack dab, well, not quite in the middle but towards the southeast edge of that reservoir, then a number of environmental concerns were raised.

If we don't do due diligence, if we don't realize – I'll use a teaching example. Kids who are hungry don't learn well. If we don't address the issues of poverty in connection with education, in connection with health, then we're going to pay for it to a much greater extent after the fact. If we don't try, for example, to keep individuals in their homes as long as we can by providing subsidies and supports and they end up having to be institutionalized, then we know it's going to be more expensive.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont, followed by St. Albert, followed by Stettler-Drumheller.

Mr. Herard: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 214, Healthy Futures Act. We all recognize the importance of health to our quality of life. It is the personal obligation of each of us to take the initiatives to better our physical, social, and psychological well-being. I hear somebody saying over there: look at who's talking. As elected officials who make decisions that influence the health of Albertans, we acknowledge our collective responsibility to be conscious of the consequences that government policies have on people's lives in this province. I'm proud that the government of Alberta has governed with the health and well-being of Albertans at the forefront of our agenda. Our government appreciates the potential health impacts of all our policy decisions and will continue to operate with due care and diligence.

Still, we recognize that there are numerous factors which impact health, and those factors are often very complex. Therefore, a broad health impact assessment may not be able to provide an accurate analysis. For the assessments to be effective, they will have to be specific and systematic. Unfortunately, the health impact assessments that are proposed through Bill 214 would examine the effect of policies on a vast amount of factors, including the technology being used, effects on a population's sociocultural well-being, and the environment. I feel that this spectrum is too large and would ultimately provide information that may not be an accurate representation of the impact of a certain policy, procedure, or program.

I think a more beneficial example of an impact assessment would be the blood tests currently being performed by Alberta Health and Wellness. The tests are examining the blood of 30,000 Albertans to determine whether contaminants from industrial sources, food, water, and household products are entering the system. The study will provide our government with a baseline which we can then use to take appropriate action if necessary. This form of biomonitoring provides us with comprehensive information. However, with a study of this size there is the chance that additional variables could influence the results. The larger the spectrum of a study the more factors there are to consider, which can be problematic when wanting to make direct correlations of the policy's impact on health. It's difficult to precisely and accurately predict how a set of factors will interact and impact public health.

3:50

I would urge this Assembly to continue to support the assessments that are conducted in certain circumstances. It is more effective to design an assessment with a clear objective that studies a specific area. We have performed successful assessments in the past that have been done in various circumstances. An example was the April 2006 report titled *Health Effects Associated with Short-term Exposure to Low Levels of Sulphur Dioxide: A Technical Review*. The study focused on a small sample and a specific element and concluded that in some conditions sulphur dioxide exposure can negatively affect the respiratory system. Another example was the August 2006 report titled *Wabamun and Area Community Exposure and Health Effects Assessment Program*, which analyzed the effects

of coal-fired power stations and oil and gas operations on the air quality and human health in Wabamun and the surrounding area.

Mr. Speaker, these are just a few examples of health assessments that have been conducted under the auspices of our government. These studies all involve thorough and strategic research for a certain purpose which was then used by our government to improve Albertans' health and wellness.

[The Speaker in the chair]

I support detailed, focused assessments, and our government should continue to ensure that Albertans are consuming nutritious and safe foods and drinking clean water. Nonetheless, we can't conduct health impact assessments that try to gauge the effects of policy decisions on a wide range of factors as this bill proposes. It would be exhausting and ineffective. Even if this bill were amended to narrow its scope, I believe there are far too many determinants to assess what makes Albertans healthy or unhealthy.

As an example, take an individual who is in hospital for treatment of a concussion, and imagine if we had to analyze every aspect, every component of why their accident happened. First, we must determine why the individual has a concussion and if their concussion will pose additional risk to their health. Maybe it was because they were riding a bike in heavy traffic and were struck down by a passing vehicle. The bike rider was not wearing a helmet because they forgot it at home. Why did they forget their helmet? Well, they were in a rush to get to work since they had slept in because the individual had been up late the night before, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera.

Mr. Speaker, I think that we can all see where I'm going with this fictional scenario. There are far too many factors and conditions that determine health. Overarching health impact assessments would have to deconstruct even more variables. The task would be endless, and the cost of administering adequate assessments would be daunting.

As a government, of course, we will continue to take into account the impact that policies and procedures have on Albertans' health and wellness. There are few, if any, decisions that are made without considering the impact on Albertans' health. After all, we have a responsibility not only to our constituents but to our families, our friends, and ourselves. We all share this province, and we all are impacted by the decisions made in this Legislature. This is why each of us has a responsibility to identify what we can do to live healthier and more active lives. I've been doing that for years, Mr. Speaker.

The government cannot be expected to manage every complex detail that may affect the health of Albertans, but what we can do is acknowledge that there are ways in which we can make improvements to our health and our quality of life. Maybe it's through organizing a recycling drive or a community choosing to walk to the corner store for groceries. They may be simple actions, but they'll have positive health outcomes that can reverberate throughout the community.

Healthy eating is essential to great health and is the key component of a person's development through life. I'm told that a healthy diet and good eating habits will contribute to reducing a person's susceptibility to chronic disease and increase their life expectancy. I've been told that and told that and told that, but you have what you have; it is what it is.

Albertans can also choose to become more active. Through physical activity a person can integrate healthy values that will guide them through their daily lives. Where have I heard that before? An active lifestyle provides many benefits. It can be done in various ways. There are hundreds of activities a person can do that are

suiting to their abilities. Funny, I've heard that before, too. It seems like the abilities tend to reduce as you get older.

Mr. Speaker, I want to encourage each of us to continue to take responsibility for what we can control. If there are changes we can make to improve the quality of life here in Alberta, then let's do it. All of us have an interest in the health of Albertans as elected representatives and as individuals.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I do believe we have the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East next, followed by the hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to stand today to add some comments on Bill 214, the Healthy Futures Act. When I look around in society today and I see what's happening to some of the products that are coming in from China – toys, dyes, medications, clothes – many things that are coming and bringing, certainly, health risks into our country, I think we really have to look and realize that we are one huge, big neighbourhood. When we look at just one small portion of it, it truly can affect the whole system, which is why I think it's so important that we can't just take a small, little portion of Alberta, that we can't just take one small farmer's area. We have to look at how (a) it's actually going to affect his neighbours and (b) what that cumulative effect is as it spreads out like a ripple in a stream from that particular area.

We need a government policy that will undergo health impact assessments to examine the policy's effect on a wide range of factors. It will ensure that the government's decisions could potentially affect the health of Albertans, and it makes them subject to a greater scrutiny for the protection and the enhancement and the sustainability of the health of all Albertans. I think many people have said this before me, and I'm sure it'll be said again: health is great, but if you don't have your health, it really is nothing.

The EUB currently considers applications on a project-by-project basis, and it results, in my mind, in short-term decision-making. It doesn't really consider over time what those environmental or health impacts are going to be. We really don't live in isolation, and we really do live in neighbourhoods. I think that here in Alberta we hear about how independent we are and how we've pulled ourselves up by our bootstraps and that sort of attitude that we can make it on our own, that type of thing. I beg to differ with that. We've had farmers and ranchers helping each other, certainly, in the pioneer days. They've helped each other build houses. They've had barn raising. They've helped each other with their harvest when it was necessary. They shared combines. They shared horses. They shared what they had to do. No one really built this province on their own.

It isn't just this side of the table that thinks that something like this should happen. Former EUB chairman Neil McCrank commented to the *Calgary Herald* on March 15, '07, that we should look at the possibility of regional hearings where we examine the broader issues, the broader societal and environmental issues. It's expected that McCrank would be familiar with the flaws in the current process and see cumulative assessments as necessary as we look forward to the future. I think that when a man of his stature makes those sorts of comments, we certainly should be listening.

The oil sands development on the scale that we have in Alberta. I'm not sure how many people in this House have actually had the opportunity to take an airplane or, preferably, a helicopter, but either one, to actually fly over and see the immense tailing ponds and the total disruption of the environment in Fort McMurray. I cannot believe that anybody would have done that and just not realized that the development up there is bound to have an impact on the

environment and, consequently, the health of nearby residents. I would contend that it would certainly have an impact on the entire province over time. People who live in Fort McMurray for a while may well get sick, and they may come down to southern Alberta, depending on what types of maladies they may have picked up. In fact, they'll need health care, and they've moved from one region to the other, so it does affect us all. They will be using our hospitals in southern Alberta.

4:00

The Radke report stated that there are about 3,000 oil sands lease agreements with the provincial government totalling 49,000 square kilometres. Approximately 97,000 square kilometres, or 69 per cent, of leasable oil sands are still available. That's a tremendous geographic area to have so much more development into it. We need to see where those impacts are going to be. I don't believe that there have been proper studies to this point in terms of the cumulative effect or, in fact, how far the ripples of that development affect every community and our citizens. Rapid population increases have tremendous implications not only just for the small city, that has now become a gigantic city, but for all the small areas around them. Small towns are being absorbed in many ways. They're either being absorbed by larger cities or they're actually having to deal with people who don't want to live in the large city and are moving out to the smaller areas and putting tremendous pressures on their communities.

I think we all know that there's the potential for many more upgraders on the horizon, and we really should be understanding exactly what those upgraders are going to be doing. Whenever I hear "upgraders" and I hear words like "cooling towers," I can't help thinking of Erin Brockovich. I think that the movie, needless to say, had a Hollywood spin on it. Nevertheless, this was a woman that had done tremendous work in terms of the fact that although this company believed that they weren't having any effect and that they contained their damage within their fences, it was quite well proven with a very successful court case that, in fact, that wasn't the case.

The key issues related to the amount of surface and groundwater used in the extraction process: the overall impact on the quality of surface and groundwater, levels of greenhouse gas and other air emissions, land disturbances in the size of the footprint on the land base, land reclamation, impacts on wildlife and endangered species, and population health. These are only some of the ones that I believe should be considered. In fact, it might be interesting to have three independent opinions to look at the overall effect and see where they meet in the middle.

I heard that these would be very difficult to do because there are so many different government departments involved, but I believe that if there was a good template that was quite clear with very clear criteria, it would speed up that process. Public input is always necessary. I also believe that public meetings can be set up quite easily, not barring, of course, the time that it takes to advertise for it. I think it can be done quite easily when you don't have as many organizational people putting it together. Give it to a couple of organizational people that have experience in the logistics of putting together public meetings; that could be done very, very easily. I have been exposed to all-party committees, and I've seen just how effective staff can be in getting the notes from those meetings back to you the next day. So I'm not sure that I buy that argument that it's too much work to protect the public. The health impact assessments are a very prominent part of the Alberta Liberal health policy and have been for any number of years now.

Development is crucial to Alberta's continuing economic success. I don't believe that anyone would argue with that, and certainly I

wouldn't. Of course, we must always be moving forward. Of course, we must be always developing what we have been very blessed to have in this province, our natural resources. But we have to do it with the idea of sustainability, and we have to plan – we don't have to go hell-bent for leather – and go forward. The oil isn't going anywhere. The workers will always be, in the foreseeable future certainly, difficult to obtain. However, I think we all know how many temporary foreign workers are actually working in the oil sands.

The quality of public policy decision-making needs to be improved by taking the health of Albertans into consideration.

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

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to join the debate on Bill 214, the Healthy Futures Act. This bill will require that health impact assessments be conducted for any major government project or legislative proposal that may affect public health. The bill requires that the health impact assessments be available for public review before legislation is approved. It would create a third-party office called the health commissioner.

The health commissioner would be responsible for collecting and reviewing health impact assessments to assess the government's overall strategy for improving health. In Alberta there are presently no legislated requirements to conduct health impact assessments. However, other types of legislated assessments, such as an environmental impact assessment, often address health issues. Needs-based assessments are also conducted to ensure public health and safety under unique circumstances.

Our government is fully committed to ensuring that the information used in creating policies is verifiable and accurate and, as well, that those policies represent the best interests of all Albertans. As a result of this commitment, our government is continuously finding innovative methods for information gathering and establishing effective planning tools. The Cabinet Policy Committee on Community Services works with Albertans, allowing them to have input into health policies, programs, and legislation by facilitating open discussions between government and the public. This committee meets with health care professionals and various stakeholders to hear their ideas pertaining to Alberta's health system and health policies. The Cabinet Policy Committee on Community Services studies Alberta's health policy in detail, hears public submissions, and sends its recommendations to cabinet for final approval. In some cases cabinet may refer the matter to caucus for discussion to ensure that a full examination of the health policies is in place.

Furthermore, our government recently established four policy field committees to deal with matters of public importance. Each policy field committee is mandated to oversee a portfolio of government departments and agencies and is responsible for further reviewing issues related to its assigned areas. By establishing all-party policy field committees to review legislation and call on outside organizations for additional information on health issues, our government is providing for sound decision-making throughout the legislative process.

The policy field committee on community services is mandated to deal with issues of public health. A bill can be referred to this committee right after first reading, at which point the committee conducts public hearings, reports observations, and offers expert opinions to enhance the bill. By having mandated committees to deal with provincial health care issues, we as legislators are able to highlight any danger or discrepancy in a proposed policy or legislation. This process ensures that sound policy decisions are made and that Albertans' best health interests are maintained.

Aside from establishing all-party committees to ensure sound

decision-making, the Alberta government has shown its commitment to continuous improvement in the area of health by creating the Health Quality Council of Alberta. This council evaluates quality improvement initiatives, identifies improvement opportunities, and reports the progress of our current health system to our government. This independent organization is legislated under the Regional Health Authorities Act and is mandated to achieve world-class excellence in all dimensions of quality and safety across Alberta's health system. It plays a key role in ensuring that objective, well-researched facts are behind policy-making decisions in our province. Given the existence and excellent work of the Health Quality Council of Alberta Bill 214's establishment of a health commissioner seems unnecessary.

4:10

Alberta is a world leader in health and wellness, and we're open to continuous improvements based on the best ideas, innovation, and the sense of shared responsibility. The Alberta government is continuously addressing the health impacts of policy decisions and effectively reviewing them to ensure that Albertans' best interests continue to be a top priority. As a result of the strong emphasis on Alberta's health and well-being, just last year the Alberta government allocated more than \$30 million in funding to create seven new programs helping to put Alberta's children and youth on a path to lifelong health. These initiatives include newborn metabolic screening, a healthy weight social marketing campaign, and a wellness fund for healthy school communities. They exemplify our government's dedication and proactive approach to ensuring the health of Albertans. I believe this government is doing an excellent job of promoting sound policies which have a positive impact on the health of Albertans.

The Alberta government is not only determined to sustain and enhance the general health of its population, but we are also taking the initiative to examine areas of specialized concern in our province. By focusing on unique circumstances in certain areas of Alberta, our government is able to ensure that appropriate health laws and policies are implemented for the benefit of all Albertans. For over 10 years the government has focused on conducting assessments to examine air contaminants in various regions of Alberta containing industrial facilities. On a case-by-case basis Alberta Health and Wellness has conducted community exposure and health effects assessment programs to examine health conditions that may be related to exposure to contaminants. These types of thorough assessments provide decision-makers with knowledge of unique health concerns occurring throughout the province, thus allowing them to create policies and laws reflective of the needs of the entire population.

The government of Alberta is already recognized as a leader for having an innovative public service which provides high-quality policy analysis and advice to support elected officials. Alberta Health and Wellness works diligently to provide timely, reliable, and relevant information to ensure that key decision-makers have quality information to support them in making informed decisions and setting priorities. To further expand their reach and accessibility to health information, Alberta Health and Wellness seeks out research conducted by various organizations to ensure that high-quality information is always available.

Mr. Speaker, it's clear that the Alberta government already has a strong and effective policy process, which places Albertans' health and wellness at the top of its priorities. As a result, legislated health impact assessments as proposed in Bill 214 are unnecessary. Their implementation will not achieve any positive effects which are not presently realized under the current system. The proposed legisla-

tion will just create more bureaucratic channels to achieve the same results. Therefore, I'm not at all convinced that an entirely new institutionalized assessment process would aid our government in improving public health in our province, so I ask all members to vote against Bill 214.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the things that has happened to Alberta, it seems to me, in the last number of years is the tremendous expansion in terms of population and industrial growth, and this is I think covered in the objective of this particular bill, where it states: to ensure that government decisions that could potentially affect the health of Albertans – and this includes mental health – “are subject to the greatest scrutiny to promote the protection, enhancement and sustainability of the health of Albertans.”

I think, for example, that in my constituency of St. Albert this particular bill would enhance the way we could take on issues before they become major problems. One of the things that has impacted our community and, particularly, our quality of life is the development of road systems around St. Albert. Certainly, we appreciate the fact that we have to have a better network of roads to get us into and around St. Albert and to the city and to areas beyond St. Albert, into Morinville and Legal and Redwater and so forth. I think that if we could have had something like a health impact assessment to ascertain, for example, the communities that were going to be affected by these changes in road designation, in dealing with things like noise, the well-being of people in terms of their own emotional and economic health, making sure that it wasn't going to have the impacts on property that they feel that it has had or is going to have, dealing with making sure that their homes would not be affected by the impact of roads on their quality of life, I think the west regional road and the Anthony Henday would have been a much easier task to relate to the community and to better explain what the impacts were going to be.

Another aspect of the health assessment methodology that I'm intrigued by is that we could be doing things like, for example, what we just had in the community of St. Albert: a major award to Neil M. Ross Catholic school. This was a very impactful thing on the physical education program that I think could be assessed in terms of its benefits and transferred to all other schools in the province at the elementary level, 1 to 6. I do see this particular bill assisting us to do those things.

The other thing that I think is impacting St. Albert greatly is the whole question of upgraders and what impact that is going to have on things like air, water, rural farmland that surrounds us, and wildlife. These are all things that could be looked at ahead of the impact of upgraders to see where we are now and to see if our quality of life and our health is maintained in terms of future development.

Another area that would be very valuable in terms of our own constituency would be the whole question of – I think we have one of the best aquasize programs in all of Alberta. Not only has it helped some of us older people maintain our ability to stay healthy, but it also works very well and is helpful in the mental health area. For example, it seems to me that in utilizing Bill 214, we could take a group study of that particular project: how people are doing with it, what's happening, look at the model now and what could impact us in the future, follow it over a period of three years, then utilize that in different centres across Alberta.

I think basically I'm supporting this bill because I do believe it enhances a lot of what I call preventative measures in order to equip communities and areas where massive changes are going to take

place so that they can be better prepared to handle these things in a much more healthy and sustainable manner.

I'll stop, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for allowing me to speak to this.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak to Bill 214 as well. I'm assuming that many thousands of Albertans are already making good choices anyway of how to maintain and improve their health. Many put a lot of effort into physical activities like walking, running, biking, skiing, and hiking, to name just a few. Then, ironically, they have health issues which require corrective surgeries in later life. Many also make good lifestyle choices in other ways, like eating the right foods, following the Canada food guide, washing their hands after using the washroom – funny, they didn't listen to their mother when they were growing up – changing their underwear, drinking plenty of water each day, as well as getting enough sleep. All those sound pretty commonsensical to me. I don't know why we insist as governments in trying to legislate what's good for people when so much of it is common sense.

4:20

Every day more Albertans realize the benefits of making healthy lifestyle choices. Perhaps they're choosing to make these changes based on the advice of a doctor. Perhaps they believe the many contradictory news and so-called scientific reports about the benefits of being healthy. Maybe they choose to live well simply to feel good. Regardless of their reason for changing their lifestyle, they're making a smart choice that they feel good about. Those choices are the kind that we want to encourage.

Here in Alberta our health and wellness system is the envy of the world. Our doctors, our nurses, other health care professionals provide exemplary service for our citizens. Our facilities are state of the art and operate to the highest degree. Our medical research is world renowned for being on the cutting edge. A system of this calibre isn't free, however. In this last year's budget Health and Wellness program spending increased by \$1.3 billion – over 12 per cent, Mr. Speaker – to \$12 billion.

I don't know and I don't have to remind the members present here today or the general public of the many debates we've had on how to address rising health care costs. But regarding these debates, there is one point which I think most everyone would agree with. The most affordable health care is preventative. Preventative health care is, I think, what this bill intends to propose. However, what I believe the bill is actually proposing is a Liberal tenet of administrative prevention that would crush the ability of the government, and particularly this House, to exercise good judgment in making public policy. I think the mechanism is a little too broad, too all-encompassing, and there may be better ways for the government to be proactive in promoting health and wellness. In fact, I think we've already demonstrated that there are several initiatives that encourage sensible lifestyles that still strike a balance between the use of public and private resources.

Included in last year's budget was a 16 per cent increase in tobacco taxes, an effort to reduce smoking and promote a healthier lifestyle. I might add, Mr. Speaker, that just this weekend I spoke to one of the small-town businesses in our riding, a recent newcomer to the community who'd bought a hotel and restaurant. Without any government or municipal intervention the restaurant was smoke free for the past four years, the period of time in which he owned the restaurant. But now he asked me in his very straightforward way if, in fact, his little business was now going to have to be smoke free on

January 1, and I said: yes, it was. Given his background, I could understand his frustration. He came to this country a number of years ago and used his hands to supplement his English. He basically told me that this was like putting us in a box, in a jail. It was up to people to decide whether they wanted to smoke or not. In reality, I think he fears for the livelihood of his business because, quite frankly, the people that don't want to smoke in that small hotel just don't go there anyway.

However, back to this little bill. This means that \$167 million will be dedicated to injury and disease prevention initiatives and health promotion and protection activities. Of particular note is the \$95 million over the next three years that's being dedicated to vaccinations.

Many of you have heard of Healthy U. I think this is a great public information and education campaign that encourages Albertans to lead healthier lives by providing information on proactive ways to improve or maintain their health. As part of this initiative the Healthy U crew travels around the province attending community events, where they provide tips and resources on healthy living.

Another part of Healthy U is the Community Choosewell Challenge, that recognizes communities for making a positive impact on the health of their residents. I would imagine that many of us that are fortunate enough to represent rural ridings have had a number of communities that have these little competitions amongst each other. They do it on a yearly basis, and they encourage innovative programming, promotion, and participation driven at the grassroots level. Communities of all sizes are rewarded for making use of their local resources and encouraging healthy choices. In 2006 112 communities took the Community Choosewell Challenge, and the 2007 challenge is shaping up to be an even more competitive situation.

One recently announced initiative is the Alberta healthy school community wellness fund, that will fund projects that promote healthy school communities and improve the wellness of school-aged children and youth. Grants of up to \$50,000 are available for large projects, while grants of \$10,000 can be used for the smaller ones. Again, I would imagine there's a community or two in some of our ridings that have already approached us on whether or not a new playground area, a wellness area could be the beneficiary of these particular program funds.

While these programs address wellness through community initiatives, this government is also taking further steps to encourage wellness through our health care system. Primary care networks are being organized by physicians in health regions across Alberta. These networks provide wellness services in ways that best meet the needs of patients. By linking family physicians to specialists, nurses, dietitians, pharmacists, physiotherapists, and mental health workers, we are ensuring that Albertans' health is maintained and improved without needing to involve the health care system. Again, I would imagine that quite a few of us can relate to the small family clinics that some of us have in our communities that access a computer that is basically online and provides good information, takes away the need for people to contact specialists, and can actually find out where in a timely fashion some of their health care needs can be met.

In the past 20 years the health care system itself has placed greater emphasis on prevention and wellness. Tests like mammograms, pap smears, osteoporosis screening, and colorectal cancer screening are far more common today and are making a real difference in preventing health problems before they start. This is just a sampling of the programs we currently have in place to encourage wellness in Alberta. There is no question that we've done a lot in this regard. In fact, for public health measures Alberta spends more per capita

than all but one other province. This per capita amount is almost 50 per cent more than the Canadian average, Mr. Speaker.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

These initiatives are definitely having a beneficial effect on the health of Albertans. In its 2004 report the Health Quality Council of Alberta reported that Albertans' health status compares well with that of Canadians in other provinces. Almost 9 in 10 Albertans rated their health as excellent, very good, or good. That same year Alberta had the third highest life expectancy at birth among Canadian provinces. Why, then, is it necessary to require health impact assessments for virtually every government action? I doubt that anyone is against encouraging Albertans to live healthy, active lifestyles, but I don't know that they're ready for another bureaucratic set-up that evaluates and sets up other positions of administrative predominance.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Cheffins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak in favour of this bill. Through the course of my comments I hope that we can bring the conversation back to what this bill is really about, which is health impact assessments and collectively what it is that we need to do, instead of talking about what we need to do individually as far as our health goes and dumping things back on the individual citizens, which is just a red herring. It's not what we're talking about at all with regard to this bill.

Ms Blakeman: Do you think they read the bill?

Mr. Cheffins: That's a good question. That's a good question as to whether or not they're really attentive to what this bill is and what this bill could be.

4:30

I commend my colleague from Edmonton-Centre for introducing a bill that is forward thinking and that is proactive, that is trying to address larger scale issues in this province which have needed to be addressed. We're, frankly, maybe at a critical point in terms of whether we're going to be able to move forward and start to take a look at the larger picture in terms of the impacts that we're having on this province.

I just want to take a few moments to talk about that in general and then to address some of what it is I think has been raised here today just because I really think we need to dismiss some of the red herrings that have been raised here today and move back to a discussion of the value that's in this bill. Again, I know that my colleague from Edmonton-Centre has noted – and I'm in agreement – that development is good in this province. Development is crucial to Alberta's continued economic success, but such development must be sustainable and carefully planned and carefully considered for the sake of the health of Albertans and for the sake of future Albertans, the generations to come.

Now, this bill requires government policy decisions to undergo health impact assessments. I mean, if we think about it, that just makes sense. This bill ensures that government decisions that could potentially affect the health of Albertans are subject to the greatest scrutiny to promote the protection, enhancement, and sustainability of the health of Albertans. Again, this just makes sense because: what's more important that the health of Albertans? We need to

look after that collectively and not just individually. Yes, there are things that we can do as individuals, but that's not what we're talking about here today.

The truth of the matter is that what we're talking about are the collective actions that we take in this province. We need to remind ourselves that we are part of something greater than ourselves here. We're talking about life itself here, and because life, in particular human life, is dependent on the systems and the environment as a whole, therefore the actions that we take collectively affect the health of Albertans, affect us all individually.

We're taking very large collective actions in this province. Again, a collective action is not a bad thing. We do need economic development, but the impacts of the current collective actions that we're taking, as far as the development side of things goes, is just huge. Again, colleagues here mentioned Fort McMurray and the development that's going on there. It's really almost difficult to comprehend the amount of development going on there. Upgrader Alley has been mentioned and the development that's going on there and coal mining also and the development there. Again, these are all good things. We're just talking about taking a look at the collective impact of our actions here.

What hasn't been mentioned very much today is logging and the importance of considering the impact of logging on our environment and, therefore, on our health. The reality is that the air we breathe, the land we rely on for our food sources, and in particular the water that we all depend on are just absolutely critical. This is something that this government has been too slow to consider, but particularly over the most recent years, with the help of members on this side of the House, we are paying more attention to the importance of water.

Now, I want to take a few moments to address some of the things that have been raised here by other members. To begin with, you know, my colleague from Calgary-Varsity has indicated that considerations can be taken in, and it's worth while that people are bringing up concerns that they might have. I know the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview talked about green screens, and he sees the value of that. But he'd like consideration of this bill, further consideration of this bill, and I think that that's a valuable position to take.

Again, my colleague from Calgary-Varsity indicated that perhaps there are ways to be able to go about that. Perhaps we can look at amendments. Perhaps we could look at a referral motion on this bill to a standing committee as something that might be of value because this bill is a valiant attempt to address issues that are critical and is worthy of full consideration. Once again, we're trying to be proactive. We're trying to be future looking. We need to take a look at what it is that we've done collectively, what we're doing collectively, and we have to figure out how we can act collectively to address those issues.

Now, the Member for Calgary-Lougheed talked a little bit about: "Well, can we do this? Have we got the resources to do it?" Realistically, we're talking about Albertans' health, so I can't think of other areas that are more important for us to address those resources to. The same member wondered whether the mechanism was timely and economical. When you talk about timely and economical versus the importance of health, it strikes me that Albertans would let us know where it is that they think the priorities lie. Again, we recognize that all of these things do need to be taken into consideration as far as the environment and economic factors. I don't see where this bill is going to stop that from occurring.

In fact, I think that what we're trying to talk about is taking a look at how things can be done across the spectrum of government activity. The Member for Calgary-Lougheed talked about 13

departments needing to be involved. Well, that's exactly what we're talking about: trying to get it so the various areas of government are working together and taking a look at the larger picture. We're talking about it as far as the environment goes and the impact on the environment. We have to talk about the collective actions and across departments take a look at the impacts that our actions are going to have on the health of Albertans. I think that if he has concerns, let him bring them forward. Let's take a look at some amendments if they think that improvements can be made. Let's take a look at referral if that's necessary as well.

I can't let things pass without mentioning some of what I think are really quite outrageous comments with regard to dumping this back on individuals. I know the Member for Calgary-Egmont talked about a healthy diet and if we walked to the store more, and I believe the Member for St. Albert said something to the same effect. I'm not exactly sure what they're recommending, that if we do a few more jumping jacks, we're not going to need health impact assessments. But, again, we need to take a look at the collective impact that our actions are going to have.

Then to, I think, really add insult here, the Member for Little Bow was talking about: well, if we washed our hands more and changed our underwear – he actually used those words – this is somehow going to limit the need for health impact assessments. I think it's an insult to Albertans to use that kind of language when we're talking about something that's as important as this, something that's as future looking and as far sighted, I think, as this bill is really attempting: for this Assembly to take a look and be far sighted and be future looking.

Other members have talked about how we're putting our children on the road to health with individual actions that parents can take. Those are all things to be commended, but realistically that's not going to do it when we're talking about collective action and the impact that it has on our health and the need for us to act collectively and take a look at the broader picture because far too often what we've been doing is too reactive, too after the fact. I think that this bill is an attempt to be proactive and to deal with issues before they become larger issues. The member is to be commended on that, and I would encourage the members of the Assembly to give every consideration to this bill.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill 214, Healthy Futures Act, would require that health impact assessments, or HIAs, be conducted for any major government project or legislative proposal that may significantly affect public health. The Alberta government has historically assessed these specific concerns and continues to do so.

This bill does not take into account, Mr. Speaker, the cost involved in conducting a health impact assessment for all government projects or legislative proposals that may impact public health. The government of Alberta conducts assessments on government projects that include impacts on the health of Albertans, projects such as proposed waste facilities and industrial developments. This method of conducting assessments on those projects that may have an adverse effect on health takes cost into account and is more fiscally responsible than completing an assessment on nearly every possible undertaking of the government.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 214 proposes that a health impact assessment be completed for all proposals that influence health, including income,

poverty, social equity, education, environment, family life, social stress, job security, and agriculture and food production, pretty much everything, almost, under the sun. As you can see, the list of all factors included in Bill 214 is very broad and does not at all consider the cost of providing assessments that affect any of these areas.

4:40

Mr. Speaker, it is likely that every proposal or project is going to fall under at least one or, maybe in many cases, a lot of these factors. Performing a health impact assessment on all of them would, in my humble opinion, be extraordinarily costly. Completing an assessment of this nature on all major government projects or legislative proposals is not necessary and, frankly, is fiscally impossible.

Currently the Alberta government requires various impact assessments such as environmental impact assessments, as I mentioned previously, Mr. Speaker. These assessments already include many of the areas described in Bill 214. For instance, the environmental impact assessment includes environmental effects, risks, and consequences associated with development proposals. The assessment report must usually contain such things as the potential positive and negative environmental, social, economic, and cultural impacts of the proposed activity. Normally it will also contain plans to mitigate potential adverse impacts, how to respond to emergencies, information on public consultation programs related to the proposed activity, and the identification of health issues.

Environmental impact assessments already analyze a number of factors related to health. Mr. Speaker, requiring health impact assessments on top of other current assessment methods would produce duplication and a lot of information overlap.

Mr. Speaker, some projects or proposals affect multiple jurisdictions. Ministers can enter into agreements with other provinces, territories, or the federal government on the assessment process. This encourages co-operation between governments on important issues and ensures that duplication is eliminated or minimized.

Mr. Speaker, performing health impact assessments on such a wide range of factors and so frequently may result in other jurisdictions choosing not to collaborate with Alberta as they may not have the budget, desire, or need for such an increase in the volume of assessments and related costs.

One example of jurisdictional co-operation occurred in 2005, Mr. Speaker, when Canada's four western provinces shared \$8 million in federal funding to implement common data standards and electronic messages to manage information related to three chronic diseases: diabetes, hypertension, and renal failure, commonly known as kidney disease. Common data sets and definitions facilitated the sharing of information to support clinical decisions by primary health care teams. The benefits of working toward a chronic disease management solution through a multijurisdictional collaboration led to benefits not achievable independently. It led to a clearer understanding of the common issues that are faced across the provinces and improved the collective knowledge base from which to make prudent policy decisions. Not collaborating with other jurisdictions can lead to duplication of information, which of course is very costly and also counterproductive.

Mr. Speaker, health impact assessments will require a considerable number of health care professionals. Health care professionals are already in extremely high demand and short supply across our province. The health sector is experiencing a global shortage, and their skills should be much better utilized by serving all Albertans. Reallocating the current supply of health care professionals for health impact assessments would increase the labour shortage very much in this industry. Clearly, there is not an abundance of health care professionals to perform the tasks required of the health impact assessments.

Mr. Speaker, some government projects and proposals involve many locations and different populations with specific needs. Some related projects are grouped together into one initiative but still target particular areas and their individual needs.

Mr. Speaker, early in 2007, 32 new projects were announced to enhance Alberta's telehealth network and provide Albertans living in rural and remote areas with better access to health care services such as chronic disease management, mental health care, cancer care, and hospital follow-up through technology that links specialists to patients.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

If health impact assessments were necessary before these 32 projects could go forward, it would be years – and I repeat, Mr. Speaker, it would be years – before any of these programs could get off the ground or even be implemented. The cost would be astronomical. Because of the different health effects on these individual populations, it seems that Bill 214 would require that the HIAs be completed on all of these projects. The government of Alberta allocated \$33 billion in budget 2007 from programs and capital grants. The complexity of subjecting all of the programs and proposals related to the budget to HIAs would be horrendously – horrendously – time consuming, not to mention extremely expensive.

Under Bill 214 it appears that all future budgets would be under scrutiny for health effects, wasting taxpayers' time and money. Implementing Bill 214 would be astronomically and excessively expensive. The time it takes for a project to reach the implementation stage would increase dramatically due to the time required to complete a health impact assessment. Mr. Speaker, you know what happens the longer we take to get projects off the ground. You've seen what has happened to costs over the last year or two. The cost of projects and proposals would significantly increase due to the cost of completing a health impact assessment prior to a project or a proposal receiving approval.

Mr. Speaker, I cannot support this bill, and I would encourage my colleagues to oppose it as well. Thank you very much.

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

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and speak briefly to Bill 214, the Healthy Futures Act. I was reminded as I've been listening to some of the debate that I attended the Calgary health region's report to the community on Thursday last in Calgary. I was pleasantly surprised and impressed that the entire report to the community was focused on wellness.

There's a very good reason for that, of course. The Calgary health region realizes that in the situation that it finds itself in – woefully short of hospital beds, woefully short of doctors, woefully short of nurses, woefully short of health professionals of all description and facing a future where it runs the risk of losing a great number of the people that it has now to retirement, to attrition and looking at what's happening to our population, to our aging population, as the baby boom demographic bulge starts to work its way through the acute-care system – there is no way that our health care system can continue being a sickness repair business, an illness and injury repair business. There are just too darn many of us baby boomers. We're getting too old, and we're only going to get older and sicker.

Now, some of us walk; some of us use a treadmill; some of us use a Stairmaster; some of us eat right. Some of us do all those individual things that a person should do to try and stave off the Grim

Reaper for as long as possible and stay healthy and productive for as many of those years that we're actually still drawing breath as we can, but statistically, actuarially, there is just no way around the fact that we have a huge bulge working its way through the population, the leading edge of which turned 60 years old last year. And that's going to cause no end of problems for the acute-care professions.

So we have to switch our focus. We have to switch our focus to wellness, to illness prevention, to injury prevention, and we have to do that not just on an individual basis, Mr. Speaker, but on a community basis, on a global basis. It is no longer good enough to lunge forward blindly – I would suggest, Mr. Speaker, that in terms of wellness there are perhaps many on the other side of the House who could do with a visit to the optometrist to improve their visioning skills – and say: we'll develop economically everything we possibly can without regard to the consequences of doing so because there's money in it for us to shove into the pockets of our jeans right now.

4:50

We need to start considering something beyond, in the way of long-term planning, what we're going to have for lunch next Tuesday. We need to consider something beyond the value of our portfolios at the end of this fiscal quarter. We need to start considering what kind of province we're creating – I'm not even going to go the children and grandchildren route; I'm going to be totally selfish about this for argument sake for a moment – for ourselves, the baby boom generation, that's about to start getting a little too old and a little too sick to clean up the mess we've already made. Mr. Speaker, this is a vital bill. Health impact assessments are a vital tool to employ going forward to ensure that what we're doing in and to this province is not having a negative mitigating health and environmental impact on our population. We need healthier Albertans, not sicker Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Coutts: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to address Bill 214, the Healthy Futures Act. Certainly, this bill proposes that before proceeding with a major project or legislative proposal of any kind that may affect the public and the public's health, a health impact assessment would be conducted. When a bill or a motion is brought before the Legislative Assembly for its consideration, the sponsor believes that a certain law or a regulation or an activity must change because the current standard is in need of improvement or the current standards are not being met.

Bill 214 suggests that this government conducts projects without concern for the public health, income repercussions, or educational or environmental concerns. It has been mentioned in this Assembly this afternoon: a lot of concern around the social issues and that it hasn't been attended to. Certainly this is not the case. This government has proven itself a steward of healthy environments for Albertans, and in every action this government takes, all Albertans' health and wellness is the first priority. Given the overwhelming prosperity, health, and high quality of life that is found here in Alberta, it is clear that development in our province has been conducted in a thoughtful and responsible manner.

Health impact assessments are used as a mechanism to gauge the potential positive and negative effects that projects may have on a wide variety of factors that may influence health. Some of these factors include the environment, quality of life, safety, and, as I said earlier, the social issues. Health has been identified and defined as bodily, mental, and social quality of people's lives. Because quality of life can be affected by government policy, this government has

placed the enhancement of quality of life on the top of its priority list. I would like to detail a few of the many ways this government continues to uphold Canada's best interests in all its undertakings.

One way this government already meets the goals of Bill 214 is through its commitment to sustainable development.

The Acting Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod, but the time limit for consideration of this item of business has concluded.

head: **Motions Other than Government Motions**

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

Alcoholic Beverage Pricing

514. Mr. Tougas moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to introduce legislation that will set minimum drink prices in licensed establishments as recommended in the 2006 report of the Alberta Roundtable on Violence in and around Licensed Premises, which will help curb the overconsumption of alcohol that may lead to violence.

Mr. Tougas: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure to present to the Legislature Motion 514, the establishment of minimum drink prices. First of all, Mr. Speaker, I realize that advocating for minimum drink prices in Alberta is no way to endear yourself to voting-age males between the ages of 18 and 25, who are most likely to take advantage of rock-bottom liquor prices. I feel, however, that the motion would ask the government to make a significant and important change to liquor laws in the province of Alberta.

Despite efforts to get some control over alcohol consumption in Alberta, there's still very much of a Wild West mentality to alcohol in this province. Perhaps it is because we are still, relatively speaking, a young province, still somewhat lacking in maturity when it comes to alcohol consumption.

It is interesting to see the evolution of liquor laws in Alberta. My father tells me that during the Social Credit years the sale of vodka was prohibited because it was too difficult to detect on your breath. Not long ago, certainly in the lifetime of many members present, there were segregated beer parlours in Alberta, where men and women had to drink in separate establishments.

Some Hon. Members: Right on. We like that.

Mr. Tougas: We're in favour of that, are we?

We had very early closing hours, no liquor sales on Sunday, rules against taking a drink from one table to another. The list goes on. Today's liquor regulations are light years removed from the puritanical laws of not long ago, and I think that this is overall a positive. Unfortunately, I think the pendulum may have swung too far in the other direction.

There's nothing new or radical about regulating liquor prices. In fact, Alberta would simply be getting in line with other provinces. The province of Saskatchewan, where alcohol sales no doubt set some sort of record yesterday, has had minimum drink prices for many years. In fact, the minimum drink prices in hotels, restaurants, and nightclubs will be increased next year by 50 cents, from \$2 and a quarter to \$2.75. In military and paramilitary messes and veterans' canteens the minimum drink price will go from \$1 to \$2.

Ontario, Canada's most populous province, has quite detailed minimum drink prices: a 16 ounce or 455 millilitre bottle of beer must sell for a minimum of \$2.67; a six-ounce glass of wine goes for

a minimum of \$2.40; one and a half ounces of spirits cannot be sold for less than \$3. Going further afield, in Aberdeen, Scotland, the licensing board there saw fit to implement minimum drink prices in light of shocking statistics. In Scotland alcohol kills four times as many people there as it did a generation ago.

In our Wild West bar scene there are no limits at all on liquor prices. I've gathered some examples of the giveaway liquor prices in some drinking establishment in Edmonton. Rest assured, hon. members, I did not gather these examples through personal experience but by asking the younger members of the Official Opposition staff to detail some examples of the discount drink prices they have witnessed. Since everyone in this Legislature today is on the far side of 40, these prices may come as a bit of a surprise.

An Hon. Member: I'm still only a few years over.

Mr. Tougas: Okay. Maybe not so far. Fine.

For example, a number of bars offer highballs for \$1, and some will sell you as many as you like. Another bar has had an event called "spare change Wednesdays," which simply meant you could buy any drink with whatever spare change you had in your pocket. Along the same lines is a promotion called "any coin, any drink." There are dollar shots on ladies' night, 25-cent glasses of draft, 75-cent highballs, for the ladies again. The list goes on. Of course, the main reason for deeply discounted liquor prices is to bring in patrons. In the retail trade they call this a loss leader, selling something at below cost in order to bring patrons into your establishment. Unfortunately, they're not selling toothpaste but intoxicants. I've heard of carloads of young people, mostly male, swarming into bars for cheap drink prices, slamming back glass after glass of cheap booze and then either staggering off into the night or to continue their drinking.

The link between alcohol and violence is well established and undeniable. The option of minimum drink prices was advocated in the government's own report, the Alberta Roundtable on Violence in and around Licensed Premises. Edmontonians remember with some embarrassment the spectacles of riots on Whyte Avenue following Canada Day celebrations and during the Edmonton Oilers' Stanley Cup run two years ago. Mr. Speaker, you can be certain that the rioters on Whyte Avenue were not intoxicated on the thrill of Oiler victories.

Of course, this is just one idea to address the problem of excess drinking and violence in Alberta's bar culture. I understand that the Solicitor General is actively looking at making changes to liquor regulations in Alberta dealing with a number of issues like happy hours that last for hour after hour. This motion should not in any way impinge upon the government's decision-making in regard to liquor regulations.

As all hon. members know, a motion does not order the government to make a decision but is simply an expression of the opinion of the Legislature. I hope, too, that hon. members will not look upon this motion as an attempt to throw a huge wet blanket over the bar scene in Alberta. There are dozens of laws related to liquor consumption in this province, and they haven't stopped anyone from having fun in Alberta's bars yet. Nor should it be interpreted as an attack on free enterprise or freedom of choice. There are many examples across this province of regulated prices on a number of products. The price of milk, for example, is much more heavily regulated than the cost of liquor in bars.

5:00

This motion does not seek to set minimum drink prices. Those prices should only be established after extensive consultation with bar owners so that the price would not be too high so as to discour-

age sales but not so low as to encourage overconsumption. The actual numbers are beyond the scope of this motion. Mr. Speaker, this motion would ask for a progressive, reasonable change to liquor regulations in Alberta. Minimum drink prices would encourage moderation in consumption with the likely result of less gross intoxication and a reduction in violence.

I encourage all members to give this motion serious thought, and I look forward to the debate. Thank you.

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

Mr. Graydon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and share my thoughts this afternoon on Motion 514, which proposes that the government introduce means to implement minimum drink prices. Our government will continue to support legislation and regulation that will improve the safety and security of Albertans. However, we must ensure that these actions have a practical and proven effect, and those are key words, as far as I'm concerned: practical and proven effect.

We must take a pragmatic approach to all issues, and if the objective is to deter overconsumption of alcohol in licensed establishments and decrease the potential of violence that can follow, then we must be confident that creating minimum drink prices would be the most effective action. I appreciate that the Roundtable on Violence in and around Licensed Premises report stated that setting minimum prices is and should be looked at as an option. The necessary research on this suggestion is being done by the AGLC, and without evidence supporting its implementation, it would be irresponsible for legislators to move forward. Therefore, at this time Motion 514 is not the most appropriate action to take.

Alberta requires licensed establishments to be accountable to their clientele and to not promote intoxication. These businesses are accredited to serve alcoholic beverages, not to support destructive behaviour. The operations of licensed establishments should be conducted in an appropriate manner that respects the laws which pertain to them. To ensure that these businesses are operated legally, the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission, AGLC, has inspectors who regularly conduct inspections and operating checks on licensed premises to assist in preventing overservice and intoxication. To bolster Alberta's enforcement efforts, our government will be hiring seven additional inspectors in the next brief while.

The AGLC ensures compliance by investigating all licensed premises, including private liquor stores, restaurants, and lounges. The inspections ensure that licensed establishments are complying with regulations regarding the enforcement of operational hours, asking customers to produce proper photo ID, restricting service to those who are intoxicated or under the age of 18 years. These measures are taken to prevent practices that may potentially lead to undesirable or unsafe circumstances. The inspectors along with police services and business staff contribute to ensuring that licensed establishments operate in a safe manner that deters violent or illicit behaviour.

Still, in some instances there remains the possibility for harmful behaviour to occur. This behaviour may or may not be mitigated by minimum drink prices. We want to enable businesses to have the flexibility to control their prices. They can operate in productive and innovative ways. This flexibility should not be misconstrued as a means for promoting gross intoxication. As consumers we're all conscious of the price of a product, and the price is almost always a determining factor in a purchase. Setting minimum drink prices would interfere with the ability of a business to adjust their price to attract customers. Furthermore, establishing minimum drink prices may not reduce overconsumption.

The Alberta government takes measures to promote individual

responsibility and to reduce further service to intoxicated individuals. Mr. Speaker, it is important that we have healthy environments for Albertans to socialize in. The practices have been regulated and are being promoted through the AGLC. Police services and stakeholders support safe and secure drinking atmospheres. Unfortunately, at this time the measures of Motion 514 are not based on proper investigations and/or research, so it does not offer a concrete method for reducing overconsumption of alcohol in licensed establishments.

That sums up the reasons that I would not be supporting this bill. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to take part in the debate over Motion 514, the establishment of minimum drink prices, a motion which reads as follows: "Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government." Let me repeat that because I don't think the previous speaker necessarily got that.

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to . . . set minimum drink prices in licensed establishments as recommended in the 2006 report of the Alberta Roundtable on Violence in and around Licensed Premises, which will help curb the overconsumption of alcohol that may lead to violence.

I'm just trying to understand, Mr. Speaker. If I got it straight here, my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Meadowlark consulted with a bunch of different provinces, but that research wasn't sufficient, wasn't valid, wasn't acceptable, didn't adhere to the established orthodoxy. Goodness knows, those other provinces probably don't let you smoke in bingo halls either. I am just amazed that I can come in here on a Monday afternoon on private members' day . . .

Ms Blakeman: Time rolls back.

Mr. Taylor: Oh, it does. Suddenly I'm on the set of *Happy Days*, man, and there's The Fonz back there in the back row talking about how we want to create healthy drinking environments. Healthy drinking environments, jumbo shrimp, and other oxymorons. Just amazing. Just amazing. It's absolutely amazing that it's always perennially 1957 on the other side of the House.

Mr. Speaker, I would remind members present that this is supposed to be private members' business, and as such you would think that all Members of the Legislative Assembly gathered here to debate private members' bills and motions, regardless of who put forward the bill or the motion and what party he or she may or may not be affiliated with, would come to this House prepared to engage in productive debate and make good legislation. Yet I'm amazed Monday after Monday after Monday to come in here and watch as the members opposite get up and read their scripted debating notes, explaining why private members' business doesn't jibe with Conservative orthodoxy. I just don't understand why these guys opposite – most of them are guys – are so afraid of lurching into the 21st century, so afraid of our dragging them kicking and screaming into the 21st century.

Where is it written in our Constitution or any other law . . .

Ms Blakeman: The Alberta Act.

Mr. Taylor: . . . the Alberta Act, the federal Constitution, that it is the inalienable right of a Canadian citizen or a citizen of Alberta to attend drink-and-drown night or dime-a-draft night? Where is that written? Where is it written that when my son or daughter, who are 20 years old and 18 years old respectively, decide to go out with their friends to what should be and what otherwise would be a

perfectly respectable establishment somewhere in the city of Calgary or anywhere else in the province of Alberta, for that matter, on a Friday night or a Saturday night, to have a few drinks and a few laughs, they have to be watching over their shoulder constantly for people who might do them harm because those people are involved in questionable activities or a questionable state of sobriety, have been partying and drinking their face off since, you know, 8 o'clock at night, and have a hair-trigger?

I think that asking people to pay a minimum amount, a set minimum amount, for a drink is a perfectly reasonable request to make of them and a requirement to have of them in a society such as this where we have among the lowest drinking age in the nation: 18. I don't have a problem with that, Mr. Speaker. Never have had. I've always figured that if you're old enough to vote and old enough to go off to war and, you know, shoot live ammunition at somebody in Afghanistan and have them shoot back at you and put your life on the line, then you're old enough to have a beer or a glass of wine or a scotch or whatever your poison is, you know. Old enough and responsible enough.

5:10

Responsibility at any age, although at the age of most of the people in this House today, certainly those on that side of the House – you know, I don't suppose those people would find themselves inside licensed establishments all that often for the sole purpose, you know, unless they're pounding back scotches with their steak.

Ms Blakeman: Not unless they do pink martinis with Geritol.

Mr. Taylor: As my colleague from Edmonton-Centre said, maybe some of them do pink martinis with Geritol. I don't know.

In any event, I don't see that it's an unreasonable limit on our freedoms or our rights at all to say that if you want to go out for drinks on a Friday or Saturday night or any other night of the week, it's going to cost you five bucks for a beer or two bucks or whatever the minimum price is, whatever the government decides. This House isn't even going to set that price. All this House is trying to do right now is urge the government to for once in its life do the right thing, you know. For once in its life.

We're not saying that a bottle of beer has to cost \$5 or \$2 or \$10 or \$20, you know. We are saying that it would be a wise and prudent idea to do away with the ability of licensed establishments to set ridiculously low prices, well below the cost of doing business, well below the rate of inflation, just to get primarily young people through the door in great numbers and get them good and hammered so that they'll buy even more after happy hour is over and the price goes up.

Mr. Speaker, I don't think there are too many people in this House who are against having fun. I don't think there are too many people in this House, although there may be a few, who are vehemently opposed to alcohol in moderation. I don't think there would be too many who disagree with the basic philosophy of life that says everything in moderation, including excess. You know, it happens from time to time. But there are reasonable limits in a civilized society that governments can impose on their citizens, and I think setting a minimum drink price is a reasonable limit.

Going to a bar in the city of Calgary or the city of Edmonton is proving increasingly dangerous and life-threatening, and it shouldn't be that way. There's no reason that it should be that way because on any given night the vast majority of patrons in just about any bar in this city or Calgary or any other in this province are honest, upstanding, law-abiding citizens. But when you mix in a great deal of alcohol with people's best intentions, people's best intentions tend to go in the rhubarb. When that happens, when inhibitions are

broken down and violence breaks out and arguments turn into fights and fist fights turn into knife fights and knife fights turn into fights with clubs or guns or something like that, that's unacceptable. There's no reason why we should put up with that or encourage it.

I know Fonzie and the gang will have a hard time with this, but I really think they should hold their noses, jump into the deep end of the pool, and take a shot at living for a few minutes in the 21st century. It might do them some good.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River, followed by Edmonton-Strathcona.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to speak to this motion. Last Remembrance Day I attended services in Manning, Alberta, and then returned to my home in Peace River and attended the Legion there. Because I was late and a little bit of jostling around, I had to buy a round for the members remaining in the house. There were a number of legionnaires. There were also some active duty members there, some rangers and, actually, active military personnel. So I bought a round – it was personal funds, Mr. Speaker – and imagine my pleasant surprise that the round cost me less than 20 bucks. I'm legendary cheap, Mr. Speaker, and I greatly . . .

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. Oberle: Agreed.

Mr. Speaker, you know, to the best of my knowledge legions are not hotbeds of trouble in serious activities, crime, those sorts of things. I say this in jest, but only partially in jest, that I want to point out that this is a complex issue and that there is research necessary. There are other factors at play here, lots of other factors. The safe communities task force did in fact identify drink prices as a possible factor, but there are other factors involved as well, I might point out: municipal planning, the density of bar seats in a region. There are a whole host of reasons.

Now, the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie chastises us for not accepting the research of the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. I just want to point out that phoning around finding out what minimum drink prices are in other jurisdictions does not constitute research, maybe fact-finding. But what about connections: cause and effect? That research is not available, Mr. Speaker. And the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie chastises us, you know, that we're supposed to be in here making good legislation. Well, at the moment we're not making legislation; we're considering a motion before this House.

He chastises us for sticking to the Conservative ideological approach, entirely missing the irony of the fact that when he makes statements like, "For once in its life this government should do the right thing," that that's not apparently a Liberal ideological position. That's somehow productive debate standing on the floor of this Chamber. It's embarrassing is what it is, Mr. Speaker.

My approach to this motion is entirely nonpartisan. I don't object to this motion on the grounds that it doesn't meet our Conservative ideological viewpoint; I disagree with this motion because it's ill considered and poorly researched. If there is any ideological approach involved here, Mr. Speaker, it would be that this party wants to use the tools of this Legislature wisely and carefully, not frivolously.

Mr. Speaker, I would lastly point out to the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie that I made this speech, ideological though it may

have been, without prepared notes or any ideological notes from some leader on this part, which is something that I doubt that I can say for that hon. member over there.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Taylor: I do not have a single note.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members. [interjections] Hon. members.

Hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, are you rising on a point of order?

Mr. Taylor: Yes, I am.

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

Point of Order

Allegations against a Member

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, 23(j). And I do need notes for this, unlike the member opposite who perhaps has nothing better to do.

Do you want 23(i) or (j)? I'll go for both of them, Mr. Speaker. What the heck, I'll throw in 23(h) as well:

- (h) makes allegations another Member;
- (i) imputes false or unavowed motives to another Member;
- (j) uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder.

Listen to the hubbub. Listen to the hubbub opposite. Can you imagine if this was drink and drown night? What they would be like?

Mr. Speaker, I want it on the record that other than for reading the text of the motion out loud, I spoke entirely without notes, as I often do, as the government whip opposite should know if he was paying attention. I don't know; was he paying attention? I wouldn't want to allege that he wasn't because I'd hate to have him call a point of order on me.

You know, I would like the member opposite to withdraw the remark. Thank you. And apologize.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

5:20

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure which remark I'm supposed to withdraw, actually. But under 23(h), (i), and (j) I might point out it was that hon. member that started the comments about ideological approach. [interjection] You don't consider it insulting to say that this party has never made a right decision in its life?

Mr. Speaker, I'm quite prepared to withdraw the remark that suggested that the hon. member made his speech with notes. I'm quite prepared to withdraw that remark. Actually, on reflection I'm not at all surprised that that member came up with that speech without notes.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Anybody else? Well, hon. member, I presume that with those remarks this matter is settled.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Debate Continued

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to Motion 514. The intent of it seems to be to encourage moderate drinking and to remain sober. I think the need is for all of us in this House to sober up for a moment and return to a more moderate tone of debate on a very serious issue.

I represent a constituency in the city, Edmonton-Strathcona, which has a sort of bar alley, you know, that they call Whyte Avenue. It's an attractive part of the city to visit, or used to be, at least. But about 10 years ago things began to spin out of control, and now there are at least 30 bars that stretch out over about nine blocks, eight blocks in the constituency. Remember, these bars don't exist on their own in a vacuum. They're in the middle of communities. So there is an impact of what goes on that's related to those bars: drinking and noise and shouting and loitering and violence, sometimes, and my constituents are very concerned.

I in fact had to convene a meeting which brought together community leaders who were very concerned about what was happening to their neighbourhood as a result of what had happened to Whyte Avenue, the bar owners and the Old Strathcona Business Association. This was three years ago. I brought them all together in my constituency office and asked them to talk with each other and find some ways of addressing the concerns, not just of businesses, not just of business associations, not just of people who go there for occasional fun, but also the people who live there and raise their children there. There are several well-known schools in the area, including Old Scona high school, Strathcona comp, and many wonderful elementary schools. All of these children and their families live in the area, and they are impacted by the excessive consumption of alcohol.

Ask them if they would like to see some measures taken by this Assembly before we have watertight proof, you know, that links the cause to effects. They would say: use common sense. You know that when people overdrink, their behaviour tends to get out of control. They engage in violence and noisy behaviour, rowdy behaviour, behaviour that's not conducive to a good quality of life for people who live in those surroundings.

Ask the Edmonton Police Service, who have to intervene and break up those fights right in the middle of Whyte Avenue, on the intersection of 104th and Whyte Avenue, 82nd Avenue, and they'll tell you that overdrinking is a problem. Overconsumption of alcohol is a problem.

Why do people overdrink? Why do people converge on Whyte Avenue to drink? Well, partly because of these competition rates. Each bar tries to attract as many people as they can, particularly on days when there are not that many customers around to attract these people. They come from all over the place: from Fort Saskatchewan, from St. Albert, and beyond, and you name it. These are young people. Often they get injured or hurt driving back. You know, they get drunk. They fall on the dance floor. They cause injuries to themselves and to others. So I think something that will encourage moderation in the consumption of alcohol is a good thing. This motion I think is an attempt to do that.

We know that other provinces do this. The concern here is that we will be sort of limiting the freedom of businesses to do what they want to do, we'll be reducing the competition. But I think places like B.C., Saskatchewan, Ontario – I've been looking at some of their regulations that were brought in to encourage social responsibility both on the part of people who consume alcohol and those who sell it. It's a hospitality industry, a hotel industry, a tourist industry. All of those are involved in it. Even if we are not totally convinced that having a floor price in the bars and the restaurants for alcoholic beverages necessarily reduces overall consumption, we have to look at the other side and ask the opposite question: does it really hurt businesses?

Well, Toronto wouldn't have those rules there if it hurt because they get a huge number of tourists. It's a city that really thrives on the hospitality industry. There are wonderful restaurants, bars, and hotels, and all of those are used by people who visit from outside, in addition to Ontarians and Torontonians who live there. My daughter

lives there, so I know a little bit about Toronto, more now than I used to. Similarly, in Vancouver, B.C., you know, the best city in the world to live – the best city in the world to live – yet they have a floor price.

The gaming and liquor control authorities in those provinces pay due attention to the interests of businesses, the hospitality industry, the prospects for tourism, and they know that bringing in these floor prices in fact encourages – it makes cities more livable, places more hospitable, safer for people to come from wherever they do to have fun downtown and in certain parts of the city without having to worry about running into people who are overly drunk and who are rowdy because they are drunk. So I don't think there is any doubt that introducing some sort of floor pricing, regulating that there be some minimum price for liquor, hurts businesses.

As a matter of fact, I worked with the Old Strathcona Business Association. Shirley Lowe, who is the executive director of it, was present at this meeting. She is quoted in the press as saying that bringing in these floor prices, some sort of regulation on how little you can charge for a drink, will not hurt the members of her business association. All the bar owners are members of their association. That's why Shirley was at the meeting that I convened three years ago. I then went with them to city hall to talk about, sort of, how many drinking spaces there should be in Old Strathcona.

There are all of these measures, you know: perhaps limiting the number of spaces, having some floor price related to the sale of liquor of various kinds, all multiple measures that we need to take in order to both promote social responsibility on the part of everybody, to make everyone feel safe and to assure communities that their life will not be disrupted simply because somehow we assumed that bringing in these measures will hurt the interest of business. Businesses themselves recognize that they have to put up with violence, put up with the breaking of their windows and their glass frames and everything else. They don't want to see that happen in their own bars. So businesses are not necessarily averse to the introduction of some price so long as all of them know that there's a level playing field, that everyone cannot reduce prices below a certain level.

For all of these reasons, Mr. Speaker, I'm speaking in support of this motion, and I encourage other colleagues in the House to consider supporting the motion as well. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, followed by Calgary-Varsity.

Dr. Brown: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to speak to Motion 514, which urges the government to set minimum drink prices in licensed establishments. As I understand it, it's an effort to address overconsumption that could lead to violent behaviour. I for one am fully in support of promoting safety in our communities and of encouraging good behaviour, but I do not believe that setting minimum drink prices is the way to accomplish this objective.

5:30

For people in Alberta, anyone over the age of 18 years, alcohol is a legal substance. Indeed, for many people it is one of life's small pleasures. For most people alcohol in moderation is a pleasant experience, and for most people it makes them feel better. For a lot of people a few drinks would make them enjoy life.

Do some people drink to excess? Of course they do. No doubt. For some people alcohol might tend to make them misbehave, but I would suggest that the price of drinks is not the cause of their misbehaviour. It is, rather, within their own makeup, their own personality. A few people having a few drinks might be inclined to

get behind the wheel of a car and do stupid things, like driving after they've been drinking, but I do believe that drink prices are not the way to pursue this. I believe that this is another instance of the creeping nanny state.

We have lots of establishments which cater to a clientele in our society which doesn't necessarily have a lot of money to spend. We have such establishments as the Royal Canadian Legion, which has moderately priced drinks. We have some pubs even in my own constituency which have moderately priced drinks and which are patronized by those in society that can't afford to partake in necessarily expensive activities, like going out to a Flames game, where it could cost hundreds of dollars and where a beer costs seven bucks.

Mr. Rodney: It was \$9.50 at the Grey Cup.

Dr. Brown: Well, my hon. colleague from Calgary-Lougheed states that it was \$9.50 at the Grey Cup. But it shows you there is certainly a diversity of different establishments in society which cater to different clienteles and people with different incomes.

I would also like to refer to a number of initiatives that the government has held. In November 2005 and March 2006 the government did hold some round-tables on the issue of violence in and around bars. As a result of those round-tables the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission along with the government launched the Cage Your Rage campaign, which is a new campaign to reduce bar violence. That was initiated in June of this year. This campaign was aimed at discouraging fighting as a result of drinking in bars and nightclubs by targeting males in the 18 to 24 years of age category. The campaign did have some effect of spreading awareness about the dangers of alcohol and violence and the value of peaceful environments in the bars.

As I said, these are a very small minority of individuals. These are individuals who have certain tendencies. I think to penalize the public at large – as I said, we are a government which believes in free enterprise. The price of drinks should be set by the free market and certainly not by the dictation of the government.

Mr. Tougas: That's free enterprise, isn't it, allowing smoking in restaurants? Should they be allowed to do that?

Dr. Brown: Well, you make a very good point, hon. member. Yes, it certainly is, but one could also argue in those instances that it's a detriment to society in terms of the cost, as a societal cost. But I would argue that the price of two or three drinks in a bar establishment does not have any societal costs. It's not detrimental to your health or anything else.

Mr. Tougas: It's detrimental to the health of the person having a drink.

Dr. Brown: Not necessarily. No, it isn't. In fact, there are plenty of studies out there which show that drinking in moderation is, in fact, a very healthy thing to do. In fact, it reduces the incidence of heart and stroke.

As I said, Mr. Speaker, it is, in fact, for many people one of life's small pleasures. It is also an area into which I do not believe that we as a government ought to intrude. Therefore, I would urge my colleagues to vote against this motion.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I want to go back to the original wording of the motion.

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to . . . set minimum drink prices in licensed establishments . . . And here's the key portion of the motion.

. . . as recommended in the 2006 report of the Alberta Roundtable on Violence in and around Licensed Premises, which will help curb the overconsumption of alcohol that may lead to violence.

Tomorrow when your constituent asks you, "Did you vote in favour of a motion that had the potential of reducing consumption?" and you say to that constituent, as the Member for Calgary-Nose Hill said, "No, I don't believe in a creeping nanny state," and then you talk to a member of Mothers Against Drunk Driving and you say to them, "Yes, I had an opportunity in this House to vote on a motion that would potentially reduce consumption, but I believe that individual rights triumph collective civil responsibility," and if you can look at that mother or constituent and say that individual rights trump societal responsibilities, if you can do that with a straight face, then I guess I know where you're going to be voting on this.

This government and this province have this maverick quality to them. They were fine with children going in the backs of pickup trucks, in the box, because it was fun driving down those bumpy gravel roads; it was fun going across the fields. We don't have to license children on ATVs on private lands. They don't have to wear helmets because that's an individual right. It's an individual responsibility, so we're not going to interfere with that. This government had difficulty with helmets for motorcycles. It had difficulty with seatbelt restraints. This is just one more example of the potential of cutting down on an unsafe practice of continuing to serve liquor at cheap prices.

The member across the way suggested that it would have cost him more than 20 bucks to buy a round. Now, if that's the depth of the wisdom associated, then I have great concern. It's the cheapness of the liquor and its availability that take away a person's reasoning power.

I was fortunate. By basically age 19 I realized that for myself smoking and drinking just weren't worth it. I spent too much time over that big white phone, as you would say, before I got the message, but eventually I did, and I didn't put anyone else's life at risk in the process. I might have done a little bit of temporary abuse to my body, but I learned my lesson early.

Also, in my youth I played rugby for the University of Calgary Stags, and I played rugby for the Calgary Saracens, and I played rugby for the Calgary Saints. Those were 17 years of liquor-associated games and sports. Being one of the few individuals who did not indulge because I'd learned my lesson early, I was the keeper of the welfare of those individuals. I was the designated driver. You get tired of putting on the boots and putting on the coats, but you have a responsibility to your teammates. I would suggest that this government has a responsibility to its citizens to enact legislation that has the potential of making establishments safer.

5:40

Now, I appreciate what the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona pointed out when he referred to Whyte Avenue. The Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, incidentally, is my MLA when I'm up at the Legislature. We have the equivalent of Whyte Avenue in Calgary. It's called the Red Mile. The types of celebrations that go on and the extra cost in terms of policing and the violence associated with what is supposed to be a celebratory circumstance is overblown.

Here we have Motion 514, which simply urges the government to follow up on the 2006 report of the Alberta Roundtable on Violence in and around Licensed Premises. It says to consider this: will harm

be done by setting base prices? If you say that harm will be done, that the entrepreneurial spirit of Alberta will suddenly be damaged, and you can live with the results of the violence and the rowdiness and the police placed in a circumstance of threat, trying to do their best to protect the public, then you'll vote against Motion 514. Then, as I say, live with the consequences of your constituents and organizations like Mothers Against Drunk Driving and Alcoholics Anonymous. Could you have done something, a small something, by setting minimum prices? You have a chance to do it. It's a small step. It's not made to be the major cure-all. It's one step in terms of creating responsibility.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright, followed by Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to join the debate, too, on Motion 514. I would like to start by commending the member for bringing this forward. It shows his concern and his compassion for people who have faced violence in the streets, particularly in the evening after drinking establishments close, but I'm sincere when I say that I do have concerns that this motion will be viewed as a magic bullet that's supposed to cure all the violence issues that happen outside of bars in the evening.

Now, I know that the minister – I've spoken to him – is doing a comprehensive review about drink prices and a myriad of other issues to try and solve the problem of violence outside of bars. I appreciate that, but I'm concerned about setting minimum drink prices through legislation or regulation. I don't want to do it on a whim, Mr. Speaker. In fact, last week we had a discussion about rules and regulations, and most every member in this House recognized that we as members in this Assembly have the responsibility to make good legislation and good regulations and to do so in a way that doesn't cost taxpayers or business owners or society a tremendous amount of time or energy. We discussed that for quite a bit of time last week.

I know that the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie suggested that excessive drinking leads to violence. I'm not going to dispute that. That could very well be one of the causes of violence, particularly out in front of bars in the evening. But again, Mr. Speaker, I don't believe that that is the only issue. The Member for Calgary-Varsity talked about this perhaps maybe being able to curb the violence.

Mr. Speaker, when we talk about rules and regulation and legislation in this House, I have a principle personally that I don't support anything that I don't know is going to work. I don't believe we should make rules or regulation or new legislation on the hope that it will work, on the anticipation that it will work, or on some myth that it might work without some concrete proof and evidence that it will do something to solve the problem we're addressing. Otherwise, we make decisions that aren't necessarily based on truth but are based on urban legend or are very heartfelt and done in good conscience but don't actually serve the purpose we intended and lead the public astray, leave warm fuzzies in everybody's heart that we're doing something but don't actually address the issue. I don't support something like that.

Mr. Speaker, a number of years ago I investigated going to the Cayman Islands for work. I talked to a lot of people on the Internet because it's very expensive to go down there, and I couldn't afford to go down there until I'd found a job. Talking to people on the Internet, I found something incredibly interesting. There was a lot of discussion on the Internet – you can probably still see some of this discussion going on – and that's that a lot of people who were

investigating going to the Cayman Islands to work got advice that the Cayman Islands was very expensive. There was an entire discussion board about how people who lived in the Cayman Islands who were foreigners and understood that things were expensive there actually had predrinking parties. They went to each other's house and drank because they couldn't afford \$10 a drink in the Cayman Islands. Now, that didn't stop them from overconsuming. That didn't stop them from going to the bar and getting drunk or causing violence in the evening when they came out of the bar. It just meant that they didn't drink in the bar, where it was expensive. They drank at home, before they got there.

That could very well happen in this circumstance. You could raise drink prices to \$20 thinking it's going to curb consumption, but if the bottles are still just as cheap in the liquor store, people will just go home and get drunk, and then they'll go to the bar and still cause the same problems. It won't necessarily be a solution.

Mr. Speaker, there's also the circumstance – when I was 16, between grades 11 and 12 I went to Switzerland for two months on a work exchange with a family. I was so excited because they didn't enforce any minimum drinking age. I thought: "Great. This is going to be my first chance. I'm 16 years old. I'm going to get to go to the bar." But when I got there, all of the people that I met didn't want to go to the bar. They were all allowed, but because they were allowed, it took all of the interest and excitement away, because they weren't prohibited from doing it.

In fact, in Switzerland when they were celebrating, I believe, their 701st birthday as a country, there was a huge party and a huge bonfire, and everybody went down there. Myself and another 16-year-old boy from the United States had a few drinks with the rest of them. The only two people out of hundreds at that big celebration for the 701st birthday of Switzerland who wound up becoming very, very ill were me and the American friend that I had. But no one else, none of the other 15- and 16-year-olds, overconsumed. Because they were allowed to drink, they didn't find any interest in it. There was no appeal.

Sometimes, Mr. Speaker, I wonder if that barrier, that legal age when you're allowed to suddenly do it, doesn't create this image that the bar is an exciting, great place and that alcohol is a wonderful, great thing. Eighteen years of anticipation leads to the very first night of binge drinking and in some people's circumstance many, many years of binge drinking because it's an exciting place.

On top of that, Mr. Speaker, my wife's family is all from Portugal. We've been over there a couple of times, and we went out for drinks with some of the family. The one thing that I noticed is that there were bars that opened at 7 o'clock and closed at 11 o'clock. There were some that opened at 10 o'clock and closed at 2 in the morning. There were some that didn't open until 4 in the morning.

Being in Portugal in some of their happening places that would be the equivalent of Whyte Ave. or the Red Mile, one thing I noticed, Mr. Speaker – at 2 o'clock in the morning here when we close the bars, we push everyone out into the streets drunk. That's what leads to violence: when you have thousands of people in the streets suddenly, inebriated and looking for a party and nowhere to go. But in Portugal when I was there, not once did I see a single act of violence because there weren't thousands of people in the street partying. People came and went all night. Some showed up and didn't start to party until 2 o'clock. Some went to bars at 10 and left at 2. Some didn't come out till 5 in the morning. I'm not going to explain who those were or how I know.

It was an interesting observation, Mr. Speaker. Putting the Cayman Islands and my experience in Portugal and my experience in Switzerland together means to me that we have to address the

entire situation around here of when bars close. Perhaps the concentration of establishments all along the same place is part of the problem.

I applaud the member for bringing this forward. If there's evidence – I know the minister is doing research – that shows that this will work to curb violence and curb overconsumption, I will be the first member to stand in this House and support this. But until I have proof, I won't support bringing in new regulations or new legislation that could cost businesses a lot and make the public think we've addressed the violence issue and it's magical unless there is some evidence that it works. If this is part of an entire comprehensive plan that deals with concentration of establishments in a place or deals with closing times – and I think it should deal with the legal age of consumption of alcohol – then, Mr. Speaker, I hope that will be the plan that will curb violence in our streets, especially in the evenings.

I won't be supporting this, but, again, I do support the member for bringing it forward. It's a debate and a discussion that needs to be had, and I encourage all members to vote with their conscience and make their choice.

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

5:50

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Let me get this straight. We have an Alberta government-sponsored panel, the Alberta Roundtable on Violence in and around Licensed Premises, that makes a recommendation that one of the things that should be tried to try and deal with some of the violence and community safety issues – and didn't we earlier today debate a bill about safer communities? But here we have an Alberta government round-table that recommends something. That recommendation is incorporated in a motion brought forward by the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

While I'm at it, I went and looked at the AADAC annual report, that was tabled in this very House within the last couple of weeks, and what did I see on page 23? A performance measurement: prevalence of regular heavy drinking amongst young Albertans, 31 per cent, one-third of our young people. Let me read the small print for you just so you don't argue with me about the facts. Once again, it's on page 23: "Regular heavy drinking is defined as the consumption of five or more alcoholic drinks on one occasion, 12 or more times a year for Albertans 15 to 29 years of age." So in your own AADAC report, your own government-funded agency, it says that this is not a good thing. One-third of our young people are binge-drinking. Now, "binge" is my word. They don't say binge-drinking in here. Five or more drinks at least 12 times a year. So two, not one but two of the government's very own funded . . .

Mr. Elsalhy: Actually, three if you add the safer communities task force.

Ms Blakeman: If you add in the safer communities task force, there are three that have all made the same recommendation, but this government gets up one after another, those private members, on this private members' day and says, "Oh, no. We really need to leave it up to individuals," completely negating the work that you collectively as a government have set out in front of us. You make me laugh sometimes. You really do. You have absolutely contradicted the work of your own government.

All of this "Oh, don't interfere in the marketplace" stuff: you interfere in the marketplace all the time. I wish my colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar was able to get up and speak with me right now. He could list all the times that you've managed to interfere in

the marketplace. [interjection] Oh, for heaven's sake. You want to address the entire situation.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River is rising on a point of order.

Point of Order

Allegations against Members

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j), language that's likely to insult or cause unrest in this House, not a single member on this side of the House stood up and said that this issue should be left to individuals. Not a single one. What we said was that perhaps a well-reasoned, well-researched approach that addresses this issue in its totality might be the approach to take. Not a single member suggested that this should be left to individuals. I would ask the member to withdraw that remark as being flippant and inaccurate.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Blakeman: I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker. I won't withdraw it until the Blues are available to have a look at what's been said. Then I'll look at withdrawing it. I sat here for this whole debate. I listened to it all, every word, and that's what was being said: leave it up to the individual; don't curtail it; don't bring in anything; don't put any restrictions on the marketplace. So, no, I'm not willing to withdraw that.

I don't think there's a point of order here. I think they're just trying to run out the time so I can't speak, and it'll impinge upon the mover of the motion. They've been successful in doing that, so I hope you're all proud of yourselves there, boys. Did you have a good time?

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, I know that it is Monday afternoon, that we've had a long weekend and have come back here, but it has opened up some interesting debates this afternoon. The hon. Member for Peace River rose on a point of order. I guess the subject matter before us today was one on which people were speaking from their heart and their mind. I do not have the Blues in front of me. I do not believe any allegations were made against an individual, but certainly there were statements thrown out at the government. I hope that members will take an opportunity tomorrow to read the Blues and reflect, and if they so wish, they can bring forward a point of order at that time, and we may deal with it then.

Debate Continued

The Acting Speaker: At this stage we are at 5:55. I hesitate to interrupt, hon. members, but under Standing Order 8(4), which provides for up to five minutes for the sponsor of a motion other than a government motion to close debate, I will invite the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark to close debate on Motion 514.

Mr. Tougas: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It has been amazing to listen to members twist themselves into knots to come up with reasons to vote against what seems like a very straightforward motion. We're just asking the government to say: look into this. We're not saying: do it. We're not saying that this is a panacea, that it's a cure-all for everything. We're not saying that it's going to solve every liquor problem in the province of Alberta. We're just saying: "Will you look into it? We feel that this is something that should be investigated. Please give it some thought." It's as simple as that.

You know, Mr. Speaker, I forgot to mention one province that has minimum drinking prices, and that's Manitoba. I want to tell you why Manitoba instituted minimum drink prices. There was a university student by the name of Kris Howard. He was a student at the University of Winnipeg, a second-year education student. One night he went out with only 20 bucks in his pocket and went to a nearby bar where they sold discounted drinks. It's estimated that he drank three beers and at least eight doubles for \$20. Then he went out that night. He said, "I'm going out to get a breath of fresh air," and he disappeared. It took three weeks to find him. The police believe he got so drunk that he fell down a riverbank into the Red River and drowned, where they found his body three weeks later.

We can make a simple declaration to the government that we need to get some alcohol consumption under control before we have a tragedy like this happen in Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[The voice vote indicated that Motion Other than Government Motion 514 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:57 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

For the motion:

Blakeman
Chase
Cheffins
Doerksen
Dunford

Elsalhy
Flaherty
McFarland
Pannu

Pastoor
Taft
Taylor
Tougas

Against the motion:

Brown
Cardinal
Coutts
Danyluk
Evans
Fritz
Graydon
Griffiths
Groeneveld

Haley
Hayden
Hinman
Horner
Johnston
Knight
Melchin
Mitzel

Morton
Oberle
Ouellette
Renner
Rodney
Rogers
Stevens
VanderBurg

Totals:

For – 13

Against – 25

[Motion Other than Government Motion 514 lost]

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, the House stands adjourned until 1 p.m. tomorrow.

[At 6:09 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Tuesday at 1 p.m.]

