



Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature  
First Session

# Alberta Hansard

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The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

# Legislative Assembly of Alberta

## The 27th Legislature

First Session

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[Errata, if any, appear inside back cover]

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, October 20, 2008

[The Speaker in the chair]

### Prayers

**The Speaker:** Good afternoon. Welcome back.

Let us pray. At the beginning of this week we ask for renewed strength in the awareness of our duty and privilege as Members of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. We ask for the protection of this Assembly and also the province we are elected to serve. Amen.

### Mr. Robert R. (Roy) Brassard October 1, 1930, to October 17, 2008

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, it's with sadness that I must advise you today of the passing of a former member, Robert R. (Roy) Brassard, on Friday, October 17, 2008, at the age of 78 years. Mr. Brassard was first elected to the Alberta Legislature in the general election of May 8, 1986, and served until February 11, 1997. During his years of service he represented the constituency of Olds-Didsbury for the Progressive Conservative Party.

During his years in the Legislature Mr. Brassard served as associate minister of family and social services, minister responsible for seniors, minister responsible for the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities, minister responsible for the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission, and minister responsible for the Family Life and Substance Abuse Foundation. Mr. Brassard also served on the standing committees of Private Bills, Public Accounts, Law and Regulations, Members' Services, and Legislative Offices.

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 Roy Brassard as you may have known him. Rest eternal grant unto him, O Lord, and let light perpetual shine upon him. Amen.

Hon. members and ladies and gentlemen, I'd now like to invite Mr. Paul Lorieau to lead us in the singing of our national anthem, and I would invite all to participate in the language of one's choice.

### Hon. Members:

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

**The Speaker:** Please be seated.

### Introduction of Guests

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

**Mr. Snelgrove:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly employees of the government of Alberta intern network. This highly successful internship program provides postsecondary graduates with professional development and networking opportunities to help

them compete for permanent jobs within government. The experience they gain provides our public service with a source of new talent that's ready to hit the ground running. The internship program is just another part of our government's strategy to attract and retain employees to ensure a bright and prosperous future for all Albertans. I would ask the interns, who I believe are in the public gallery, to rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

**Mr. Amery:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 36 students from the Almadina language charter school located in my constituency of Calgary-East. This academy specializes in ESL and is providing a great service to a multicultural and diverse city. I'd like to thank Principal El-Rafih and Vice-Principal Hammoud and all the staff for making the Almadina language charter school a success story in the last few years. The students are here today with their teachers, Mr. El-Masri, Mr. Elladen, and Mr. Burt. They're seated in the public gallery. I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

**Mr. Vandermeer:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly 17 students from the Belvedere elementary school, the neighbourhood where I grew up, in the northeast corner of Edmonton. They are accompanied by their teachers, Mrs. Janice Bogner and Ms Ashley Charbonneau. I'd ask them to rise – they are in the members' gallery – and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege and honour to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all hon. Members of the Legislative Assembly a group from St. Gabriel school, another very fine school in the Edmonton separate school system. This group has 23 members. The group is led by teachers Mr. Corey Roffey and Mrs. Kandise Salerno, and today we have two teachers' assistants, Mrs. Louise Dupuis and Ms Lorraine Beaudoin. They're in the members' gallery. I would now ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

### Members' Statements

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

### Waste Reduction Week

**Mrs. McQueen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As many of you know, October 19 to 25 is Waste Reduction Week. A number of events and announcements planned for this week will draw attention to what we can do to reduce waste in Alberta. Albertans are concerned about waste and have encouraged provincial and municipal leadership on this issue. According to Statistics Canada, Albertans produced more than 1,000 kilograms of waste per person in 2006, one of the highest waste disposal rates in the country.

Alberta faces unique challenges that other Canadian jurisdictions do not with our unprecedented population growth and an expanding industrial sector, creating additional stresses to the waste stream.

We have responded with a comprehensive approach to address the complicated nature of waste, detailed in Alberta's Too Good to Waste strategy, which was announced last fall. The strategy reaches out to all Albertans through our community partnerships and stewardship programs, making a real impact on reducing waste in Alberta.

We have some of the longest running and most successful stewardship programs in the country. We recycle 75 per cent of beverage containers purchased and celebrated the 10 billionth container recycled just this summer. Our tire recycling program: almost five million tires a year, and this summer we celebrated the milestone of the 50 millionth tire recycled in Alberta since 1992. Our electronics program has kept millions of monitors, computers, printers, and TVs out of Alberta landfills, and 20 million used commercial pesticide containers have been collected since 1980.

Mr. Speaker, Waste Reduction Week reminds Albertans to start making small changes in their lives that will collectively make a significant difference in our province. It begins in our homes, our workplaces and, for our future leaders, in the classroom.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

1:40

#### Small Business Week

**Mr. Dallas:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Small business is an essential component of the Alberta economy. In 2006 small businesses were responsible for 20 per cent of Alberta's gross domestic product. According to CIBC economist Benjamin Tal, small-business activity will continue to outpace the rest of the economy. He further projects that small business will lead the economy next year.

The Alberta Chambers of Commerce, the 127 community chambers, and the 22,000 businesses they represent in Alberta are recognizing and promoting this vibrant sector of our economy by celebrating Small Business Week from October 19 to 25. Small Business Week provides educational opportunities and networking events, which can, by the way, be found on their website at [www.abchamber.ca](http://www.abchamber.ca), and it profiles business excellence and promotes the importance of the small-business community to our economy.

While I'm proud to say that Red Deer provides a great economic climate for small business to thrive, I would also like to acknowledge that the Red Deer Chamber of Commerce and small businesses in Red Deer make it a wonderful place to live. They provide our community with jobs and attract new workers to Red Deer. They supply us with much-needed products and services, and they contribute to the community with their charitable work. They increase our tax base, allowing government to provide infrastructure and public services.

Mr. Speaker, because of all of this, I would like all the members of this Assembly to join me in recognizing the Alberta Chambers of Commerce and its local chambers during Alberta's Small Business Week.

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

#### Midwifery Services

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On October 16 the government announced that midwifery services will be funded under health care. I have been advocating this for 19 years, and I want to take a few moments to do a victory lap and to acknowledge some of the wonderful people who shared the vision and who stayed with the cause.

I must start at the beginning, with Safe Alternatives in Childbirth, known as ASAC, in Edmonton and with Birth Unlimited in Calgary. In Edmonton the first meeting was held 30 years ago at the home of Ray Rasmussen and Sandra Dowie. Special mention must also go to Dr. LeRiche and Dr. Ben Toane, who supported this organization and its goals.

My congratulations to Sandra Dowie, the first president of ASAC; to the vital volunteers for ASAC and Birth Unlimited Margaret Larsen, Paula Cryderman, Henriette Douziech, Darlene Gartner-Weiss, Joann Johnstone, Wendy Molnar, Sandra Botting, Laura Goulet; and the ASAC past presidents Janet Schwegel, Carmen Noel, Cherilyn Michaels, Karen Wirtanen, Tracy Kennedy, and Amanda Whiting.

Mr. Speaker, the original midwives, Noreen Walker and Sandy Pullin, were joined by others: Susan James, Annita Damsma, Kerstin Flanagan, Martha Gostkowski, Linda Moore, Maureen Ellis, Donna Gibbons, Wendy Lester, Barbara Scriver, Joanna Greenhalgh, Marie Tutt, Sara Day, Karen Robb, Sharyne Fraser, Patty Lenstra, Meryl Moulton, Penny Salkeld, Joy West, Susan Dowell, Evonne Smulders, Arlette Allyjan, Bobbie Fraser, Sheila Harvey, and Jo Pettersson\*. And that's just to name a few.

I also want to recognize the contribution of the members of the Alberta Advisory Council on Women's Issues, who made three recommendations to the government: to make midwifery a profession, to have standards and practices developed, and to fully fund midwifery services under health care. Take a victory lap, everyone. It only took us 19 years.

Thank you.

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

#### National Students against Impaired and Distracted Driving Day

**Mrs. Sarich:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I want to highlight an extremely important day for our citizens across the province. October 20 is National Students against Impaired and Distracted Driving Day.

Since September 2006 Alberta sheriffs have helped move more than 700 suspected impaired drivers from the road. Distracted and impaired driving quite often leads to injury and death across our province and country. Acknowledging this day helps bring attention to the cause and reminds all Albertans of the consequences poor driving decisions can bring. It's also vital that Alberta's youth learn these lessons at the young age so that they can grow up to be strong members of society and make positive driving choices.

The Student Life Education Company, a registered charity and not-for-profit organization dedicated to saving the lives of Canadian students, has done a lot of work to promote healthy decisions on the use or non-use of alcohol among youth. The efforts of this organization along with other groups such as Students Against Drinking & Driving and Mothers Against Drunk Driving to decrease impaired and distracted driving in our country are very admirable. I am pleased to rise today to honour this day and the many people who continue to work hard at increasing awareness about impaired and distracted driving and at promoting safe driving choices.

Thank you.

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

#### Medicine Hat Police Chief Gordon Earl

**Mr. Mitzel:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past Thanksgiving weekend Alberta's policing community was saddened to learn of the

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

sudden death of Medicine Hat police chief Gordon Earl, who passed away at his family home on Saturday evening, October 11.

Chief Earl is best remembered for the strong and vibrant leadership he provided to the men and women of the Medicine Hat Police Service and to the community of Medicine Hat. His first love was his family, and his second love was the police force. Mr. Speaker, his focus on excellence in service and his commitment to ensuring a safe and secure community will be remembered by his family, friends, and colleagues.

Chief Earl's funeral took place last Saturday in Medicine Hat. It was attended by the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security, the Minister of Environment and MLA for Medicine Hat, the MLA for Calgary-Hays, and myself from the government of Alberta. Over 1,500 people attended, including chiefs and members of many of the police forces in Alberta. On leaving the service at the Cypress centre, the honour guard of uniformed members lined both sides of the street for over a block. It was a fitting tribute to Chief Earl.

On behalf of the government of Alberta I extend sincere condolences to Chief Earl's family and the staff of the Medicine Hat Police Service.

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

#### National Infection Control Week

**Dr. Sherman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak about National Infection Control Week. As the early signs of winter are upon us and the flu and its many bacterial and viral friends await to pounce when our body's defences are down, we recognize this week, October 20 to 24, and its theme, Antibiotic Resistant Organisms: A Call to Action.

A key component of this theme is the reinforcement of clean hands. In line with this goal we have distributed to all members of the Assembly these hand sanitizers from the Health Quality Council of Alberta. It's a reminder that one of the main ways that we can spread germs and infectious diseases like influenza to one another is simply by the things that we touch.

In January this government introduced clear infection prevention standards and controls for all of our health facilities in order to be a national leader in patient safety. We invested \$16 million in infrastructure enhancements to improve hand hygiene in our facilities and in the training of proper techniques for hand hygiene. The Alberta government also recently expanded our free flu immunization clinics to include all children under five and all adults 50 and over.

The influenza virus, contained in droplets, can live five minutes on hands and live for one or two days on hard surfaces. With routine immunization and proper handwashing we can limit the transmission of flu in Alberta and the lineups in emergency departments. Remember: when you're washing your hands, use warm water and soap, rub your hands together for at least 15 seconds, rinse well, and pat dry with paper towel. Use your paper towel to turn off the taps to avoid recontamination. When you use hand sanitizer, make sure to check the packaging. There should be at least a 60 per cent alcohol content to be effective against germs and bacteria.

In closing, I would encourage all members in this Assembly to use this hand sanitizer to wash their hands so they don't get sick and have to miss question period. Mr. Speaker, in the event that any of the members here get the flu and get sick and get a fever, I'd be happy to provide a doctor's note so that we can excuse them so that they don't get everybody else sick.

Thank you.

#### Oral Question Period

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

#### Health System Restructuring

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Health and Wellness. The Capital health region was widely regarded as the best in Canada and in some circles as one of the best in the world. Odds are that disbanding Capital health will lower the health services available to the people of the Edmonton region. What possible reason does the Minister of Health and Wellness give to the people of Edmonton for disbanding the best-performing health region in the country without notice?

**Mr. Liepert:** Mr. Speaker, it's an asinine statement for this member to say that somehow the health services of this city are going to be less than they were under the previous health region. This member is doing nothing but spreading falsehoods. I would suggest that he take a look at the health delivery system in this province over the last six months. It has been as good as or better than it was prior to the merger of the boards.

1:50

**The Speaker:** The hon. leader.

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Sheila Weatherill, CEO of Capital health, was regarded by many as the best health care executive in this country. To the same minister: why did this minister force her out of the health care system through a surprise firing?

**Mr. Liepert:** Well, Mr. Speaker, when we created the Alberta Health Services Board, we put in place an interim board of directors and an interim CEO. We did that because we needed to ensure that we had a board and a management team that were representing all of the province's interests. As we move forward, we will have a permanent board in place, and that permanent board will then select the permanent CEO.

**The Speaker:** The hon. leader.

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: what was the role of the Deputy Minister of Health and Wellness at the time in the decision to terminate the Capital health board and the CEO?

**Mr. Liepert:** That decision, Mr. Speaker, was made by this caucus.

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

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, again to the Minister of Health and Wellness: does the minister have an explanation for why he did not lay the foundation for the changes he is making to the health care system in advance of dismantling the regional health authorities? He's got the cart before the horse here.

**Mr. Liepert:** Mr. Speaker, I've said in this House previously that in last spring's election campaign we campaigned on a theme of change that works. We've made changes in a number of areas, and health care is one of them.

**The Speaker:** The hon. leader.

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you. To the same minister. This minister said that he believes one of the problems with Alberta's health care system is that it is a monopoly, yet he – he – is the one who for the first time in history created a single health care monopoly in Alberta. What is the minister's plan to end this so-called monopoly on health care delivery?

**Mr. Liepert:** Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure what source this particular member has got me allegedly quoting relative to a monopoly. I don't recall ever mentioning that. What I said is that we need to ensure that we have an accessible, patient-focused, and sustainable into the future health care system, and that's what we're going to create.

**Dr. Taft:** To the same minister: can the minister now publicly address the concerns of Edmonton's charitable foundations, who helped Capital health become a world leader, on whether their future contributions will stay within their community?

**Mr. Liepert:** Mr. Speaker, I've written on two occasions now to all of the chairs of the health foundations in this province stating exactly that.

**The Speaker:** Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

#### Health Services Board Executive Operating Officer

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Health and Wellness. The former Deputy Minister of Health and Wellness, Paddy Meade, received in 2007-08 a salary of \$396,000. She's now employed by Alberta Health Services, receiving \$515,000. What severance package, if any, did she get from Alberta Health and Wellness before she left there and went to the Alberta Health Services Board?

**Mr. Liepert:** None, to my knowledge.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you. Again to the same minister: why was there no discussion of a possible conflict of interest in Paddy Meade's appointment as executive operating officer of the continuum of care division before her employment with the Alberta Health Services Board?

**Mr. Liepert:** Mr. Speaker, I think this member has actually referred that issue to the Ethics Commissioner, and the Ethics Commissioner's report is public. If the hon. member has an issue with an officer of this Assembly, I suggest he take it up with the Assembly.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister. This has nothing to do with the Ethics Commissioner or his report. Why has a contract of employment been drafted between Paddy Meade and the Alberta Health Services Board but as of September 4, 2008 – this is a couple of months after employment – the contract had not been signed by either party?

**Mr. Liepert:** It's correct, Mr. Speaker, that there is a letter of

employment. There are some legal implications that I believe are either completed or about to be completed, and when that's done, I would be happy to review the contract and sign it.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

#### Police Funding

**Mr. Mason:** Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Calgary's chief of police, Rick Hanson, has called the Premier's approach to police funding a shell game. Calgary has asked for \$25 million over three years, and the Premier says that the municipalities will need to cut other programs if public safety is a priority. On Friday there was a bloody rampage in a Calgary nightclub. Five people were shot, and this government doesn't care. To the Solicitor General: when will this government stop playing games and address the safety of Albertans?

**The Speaker:** The hon. Solicitor General.

**Mr. Lindsay:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I haven't heard a question quite as ridiculous as that since I've been here. I certainly want to indicate that our hopes are with those people that were injured, and we certainly hope that they recover fully.

In regard to Chief Hanson's comments, I want to go on the record as saying that Chief Hanson is very passionate about policing the city of Calgary, and we're giving him support as we can, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Mason:** Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. On Friday two cars raced through the streets of Edmonton shooting at each other, and this government doesn't care. To the Solicitor General. Despite repeated requests from mayors and chiefs this government is still dragging its feet and refuses to provide additional funding for policing. When will this government start doing its job and fund the policing priorities of municipalities?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Lindsay:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member seems to have a short memory because I was standing up here last week and pointing out that this provincial government under our Premier is putting \$456 million into safe communities initiatives, money that's going to go to the root cause of crime, not just to put more policemen on the street but also to get to the root cause and help those who need the help that they deserve.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On Thursday someone was shot in a Calgary convenience store, and this government doesn't care. Again to the Solicitor General. Calgary's chief of police has said that you're playing political games. When will you stop playing games and protect Albertans by providing the necessary funding for policing?

**Mr. Lindsay:** Mr. Speaker, this province does provide sufficient funding. I want to go on the record as saying that since 2004 to 2005 our provincial police funding in this province has increased from \$246 million to \$354 million, so we do care.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

#### Anthony Henday Drive Interchanges

**Mr. Xiao:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Here is good news for you. Today the government announced that the construction of the Anthony Henday Drive-Stony Plain Road intersection will commence in the spring of 2009, following the submission of final design proposals early next year. This interchange will no doubt make a great difference in reducing traffic congestion and improving the safety of our commuters. On behalf of my constituents and all Albertans and all Edmontonians I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude and praise for the leadership of the Premier and the minister on this project.

**The Speaker:** Now we have a problem. Sorry. Sit down. The time has expired for your question. I presume someone might want to respond.

Second question.

**Mr. Xiao:** My second question: with the announcement today can the minister explain when this overpass will be completed and ready for traffic?

**Mr. Ouellette:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the hon. member for his question. It just goes to show how important we believe it is to look after the city of Edmonton and get rid of the congestion that's there. We're doing that particular interchange. We have now released the request for proposals. It will be done under a design, build, deliver concept. We feel it will be done a full year earlier than on conventional delivery. We're saying that we'll start it in the spring of '09 and that it'll be completed in 2011.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Xiao:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One final supplemental to the same minister. Three interchanges remain on the Henday after this project: on Callingwood Road, at Lessard Road, and at Cameron Heights. What is the timeline for the completion of these interchanges?

**Mr. Ouellette:** Mr. Speaker, as I was saying before, when we first took over that road from the city of Edmonton, we didn't expect the type of traffic counts that are there. We're moving ahead as fast as we can on the design of those intersections. For Lessard and Callingwood, we believe that the engineering and design will be completed in December. As for Cameron Heights, as we speak, we're in the process of selecting an engineering firm to go ahead with that one also. We will get them done as soon as possible. We are making the commitment that they will all be done by 2015 so that we have a complete free-flowing ring road all around the city of Edmonton.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

2:00

#### Health System Restructuring

*(continued)*

**Mr. Taylor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since May 15 I've received a number of letters of concern regarding how appointments to the Alberta Health Services Board are made. These letters have come from concerned citizens and municipalities who are worried about

how the restructuring will affect them and their ability to access first-class services wherever they live. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: can there be any guarantee given to more remote areas, such as the municipal districts of Spirit River and Big Lakes, that their distinct regional health care needs will receive the attention they deserve?

**Mr. Liepert:** Well, Mr. Speaker, this government represents all Albertans.

**Mr. Taylor:** Mr. Speaker, I wouldn't want to try and get my money back based on that guarantee.

How will the government address the issue of how the Health Services Board is accountable to the people of Alberta when all its members are appointed by the minister and may be more focused on pleasing the minister than administering excellent health care delivery?

**Mr. Liepert:** Mr. Speaker, the process for appointing board members hasn't changed. The minister appointed the members under the nine regional health authorities, and this government will continue to appoint board members under the new Health Services Board.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Taylor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Would the minister agree that if the average Albertan has no means of holding the Health Services Board accountable for the direction that health care is headed, then citizens can direct all their letters of complaints directly to the minister, seeing as how he is the guy in charge?

**Mr. Liepert:** Mr. Speaker, we receive lots of letters. We respond to every one, and we'll continue to do so in the future.

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

#### Northeast Anthony Henday Ring Road

**Mr. Sandhu:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Transportation announced today that the government is moving forward on the Stony Plain Road and Anthony Henday interchange. Earlier this summer the Premier and minister announced the construction of the northwest Anthony Henday through a P3 process. With these two announcements the ring road is starting to come together. My questions concern the main piece of that ring road. To the Minister of Transportation: when can we expect to see construction on the northeast section of the Anthony Henday?

**Mr. Ouellette:** Well, as you know, Mr. Speaker, the Anthony Henday is definitely a great project for this capital region. We're currently doing engineering work on the northeast, which would be the final leg of the Anthony Henday. That's called the planning study, and it will be completed by April of '09. By that time, we will be in a position to determine the scope of that project.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Sandhu:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary is for the same minister. Can the minister confirm that when the northeast section moves forward, it will be completed to free-flow standards; in other words, with no traffic lights?

**Mr. Ouellette:** Mr. Speaker, I wish all my questions were that easy. We've learned our lessons on the other ones, and I can guarantee him that that will be free flow.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Sandhu:** Thank you.

**The Speaker:** It's not an 801 or anything like that?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Strathcona.

#### Alberta Treasury Branches

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While the rest of the world is uncertain and fearful about their finances, the government-owned bank, ATB, decides to reward its executives with huge bonuses, even though it took unnecessary risks that led to millions of dollars in lost profits. When mistakes are made, there should be consequences. My questions are to the minister of finance. Why did the minister not act when the ATB board overrode its own policy and rewarded executives with \$26 million in bonuses, even though the actions taken put the taxpayers' dollars at risk?

**Ms Evans:** Mr. Speaker, I support the board in the decision the board made. The board understood that the variable pay was for performance. This was a market failure, not a performance failure, and for literally thousands of employees their salaries were not increased by a significant amount but by a recognition of their performance. In terms of the executives that were given considerably more in bonuses, again that was a board decision that accounted for what they believed had been sufficient due diligence on the job.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Ms Blakeman:** Wow.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: does the minister agree that it is not sound business practice to reward poor decision-making and that eliminating the fear of losing a hefty bonus also removes any incentive to act prudently?

**Ms Evans:** You know, Mr. Speaker, there are going to be a lot of people judging the asset-backed commercial paper from the rear-view mirror, assuming then that with that clarity of vision they would have done something differently.

Eighteen hundred individuals in Canada made that investment. Many of those people made investments through other institutions. I'm very satisfied that the due diligence that they did in exploring that was sound. They did their very best to determine whether it was a sound judgment. They followed through with that judgment. The fact that it failed – everybody understands that there are security risks. They unfortunately had them.

**Ms Blakeman:** Except that we all had to pay for that.

Back to the same minister: what oversight or direction was provided to ATB by the department or the minister regarding its exposure to asset-backed commercial paper before and after the market disruption?

**Ms Evans:** Mr. Speaker, just stepping back from that supervision that is being suggested by the hon. member and looking at the decision-making process of the board, the board, in fact, is entitled to make the decisions and support the executive in those decisions

in the manner they did. But let's not believe that because they made a decision in a market that collapsed, that was the wrong decision to make. In fact, along with the write-down there's an assumption that those dollars will accrue back to ATB within the next five to seven years.

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

#### Passchendaele

**Mr. Quest:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The movie *Passchendaele* opened in theatres across Canada over the weekend. My first question is to the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit. How much government funding was committed to this project, and how was this funding spent?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Blackett:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A grant for \$5.5 million was approved through the government process and administered through the centennial legacies program. The grant was provided with the intent that it would primarily be spent in Alberta involving Alberta cast, crew, and facilities. More than 200 Albertans were employed as part of the crew.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Quest:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question to the same minister: what benefit is this funding to Albertans?

**Mr. Blackett:** Well, Mr. Speaker, *Passchendaele* is not an ordinary project. It was a centennial project that tells an important part of Alberta's history. It's a memorial to our country's heroes announced in the Year of the Veteran, in 2005. Filming took place during the summer of 2007 in the Calgary and Fort Macleod area as well as on the Stoney Nation and Tsuu T'ina reserves. The funding contributed to the hiring of the Alberta film crew, involved filming locations around southern Alberta, and highlights a chapter of Alberta history through a broad commercial medium.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Quest:** No supplemental.

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

#### Funding for Private Schools

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Education said on Thursday, "It's an absolute myth that private schools . . . are the purview of the rich and famous." However, tuition rates at private schools are \$10,000, \$11,000, \$15,000, and the list goes on. There are almost 130 schools in the province that receive public funding on top of charging these sky-high tuition rates. My questions are to the Minister of Education. Can the minister explain to the average Alberta family why their public tax dollars are funding schools which they cannot afford to send their children to? Fifteen thousand dollars is hardly chump change.

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Hancock:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, there are 127



accredited, funded private schools in the province, and they educate approximately 3.5 per cent of the province's students. Now, if those students were to be educated in the public system, we would of course pay 100 per cent of the instructional grant. We would pay 100 per cent of the operation and maintenance grant. We would then also pay 100 per cent of the transportation grants, 100 per cent of the capital cost grants, and it goes on. In fact, the public of Alberta is well served by having a broad range of choice in education, and private schools provide one part of that choice.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you. Why is it that a significant increase in funding to private schools was given without any consultation with the public? I wonder how the public feels about this private funding. Did you ask them?

2:10

**Mr. Hancock:** Well, Mr. Speaker, you know, there's always this myth that goes on that says that there's no consultation with the public. In fact, there are 83 members of this House, and we're consulted on a regular basis by people who want the government to make changes. I can tell you that there's been a lot of discussion around the proper level of funding for private schools. A lot of my colleagues have approached me over the course of the last six months about funding for private schools, and I know that that discussion was going on long before that. The long and the short of it is that 10 years ago there was a review done. The funding was set at 60 per cent. It's now 10 years later. A number of private schools were talking with public schools about associations. It was timely to make the change.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you very much. When will this government stop funding elite and/or discriminatory private schools and focus instead on strengthening the public system to make it the very best it can be? The public school has no discriminatory policies.

**Mr. Hancock:** Well, we're very fortunate in this province, Mr. Speaker, to have a public school system which is acknowledged by many in the world who come to see it as being one of the best in the world, that they would like to emulate. One of the reasons that they come and want to emulate our system is because of the accountability framework that's in place. The hon. member will be delighted, I'm sure, to know that in order for private schools to accept this additional amount of funding that's available, modest as it is, they have to increase their accountability measures and report more broadly on how their students are achieving not only to the government of Alberta, the Department of Education, but to the public.

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

### Homelessness

**Ms Notley:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Tomorrow is the day that Homeward Trust rallies volunteers to go into the street and count Edmonton's homeless population. Meanwhile, Calgary's homeless population has increased fourfold in the last 10 years. The minister of housing was quoted in the media this weekend bragging about her government's strategy to find floor mat spaces for all the new homeless people in Calgary. To that minister: how can you or any member of this government possibly be proud of a situation where

over the last 10 years the number of people being forced to live on the street has increased by at least 400 per cent?

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs.

**Mrs. Fritz:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member is absolutely correct that the homeless count by the Edmonton Homeward Trust is coming out tomorrow. I am looking forward to that count. We are providing 220 shelter spaces in Calgary, and I have to tell you that that initiative came from the community. How the member described that situation is not quite accurate. It's the community that came forward. They established the extra shelter spaces. They based it within their own organizations. I thank them for stepping up for us.

**Ms Notley:** Well, what's accurate, Mr. Speaker, is that the number of people living on the street has gone up by 400 per cent over the last 10 years.

To the same minister: given that the Auditor General identified the need for safe, affordable housing for people with mental illness and that in Calgary alone he identified at least 1,500 people with mental illness who don't have adequate funding, will this minister commit to additional funding to deal with the crisis in transitional housing for people with mental illness?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mrs. Fritz:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To be accurate, the homeless situation did increase over the last year by 18 per cent. The reason why it has changed over the past year, too, is because of the good programs that are being offered by the community. One of those that the member would be interested in is Pathways to Housing. That is very much meeting the needs of people that do have mental illness. Yes, we know through the homeless data that 40 per cent of our people that are homeless do have a mental illness or an addiction. I can tell you that there are some very good programs addressing that need.

**Ms Notley:** Well, Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General said that there aren't enough programs dealing with that need.

Just going on, we know that one other component to the growing homeless crisis comes from people who cannot pay their rent. To the same minister: why won't you implement rent increase guidelines?

**Mrs. Fritz:** Well, Mr. Speaker, that came forward as a recommendation two years ago in the Affordable Housing Task Force report, and the decision has been made to not put in rent controls.

I have to tell you that this government has really stepped up with the direct rent supplement program, with rent supplement programs that are to the landlords as well. That increase has been significant, and I know that it is addressing the need for rent for people.

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

### Waste Reduction

**Mr. Rodney:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In this Legislature and indeed around the world Alberta is often referred to as a leader. However, it is not always a positive claim. According to Statistics Canada our province is leading the country in per capita waste, and perhaps we can all agree that this is the type of leadership that

Albertans are not looking for. My question is to the Minister of Environment. What is Alberta doing to reduce waste in this province and put Alberta on the leadership track in a better direction?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Renner:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member is absolutely correct. This province is leading the way in so many areas when it comes to environmental issues, not the least of which is reducing waste. Our waste reduction strategy, Too Good to Waste, was the subject of a member's statement by the Member for Drayton Valley-Calmr just today. We have shown leadership in stewardship programs: beverage containers, tires, electronics, paint, used oil. We're on the cusp of signing an agreement for a construction and demolition waste program. We're working on packaging and print materials with provincial agencies, and of course in this House we've talked about one simple act and how individuals play a role.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Rodney:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the same minister and based on some questions I've had from some great constituents. They want to know: what action is this government taking to ensure that the Alberta landfills that are used to store waste don't become eyesores and sore spots for the municipalities that are charged with maintaining them?

**Mr. Renner:** Well, Mr. Speaker, as you know, the best way to control landfills is to not use them in the first place, and that's what waste reduction is all about. That being said, we have committed a significant amount of money, in the vicinity of about \$80 million, plus a significant matching-dollar contribution from municipalities to remove a lot of small, old-fashioned dumps and replace them with regional landfills that are state-of-the-art facilities and ensure that we protect the environment to the maximum extent possible.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Rodney:** Thanks, Mr. Speaker. My last question is to the same minister. Over the years, of course, we've all heard so much about reduce, reuse, recycle, and so on, but what's the latest? Can the minister tell us the technological solutions that are available to help Albertans to manage their growing mounds of waste today and in the future?

**Mr. Renner:** Well, Mr. Speaker, no technology will replace reduce, reuse, and recycle. That is the best way to deal with waste material. That being said, there are some I think really good opportunities for us to recover energy from waste. We've a couple of projects that are in their infancy and about to get started in Alberta, one in Red Deer and one here in Edmonton, that show great promise to gasify waste, capture the energy that's contained within that waste, and produce electricity.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

### Funding for Private Schools

*(continued)*

**Mr. Taylor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to get back to this

notion of increased public funding to private schools and the accountability question. Private schools don't fall under the same rules that public schools do, and even though the government announced new accountability measures, many education groups have noted that they're simply not enough. To the Minister of Education: why is it that private schools have a different set of rules when they're now getting 70 per cent of their operational costs paid for by public tax dollars?

**Mr. Hancock:** Well, they have a different set of rules because we said that if they wanted to move from 60 to 70 per cent of operational funding and if they wanted 70 per cent of the operation and maintenance funding, they would have to improve the accountability measures that we expect from them.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Taylor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the minister explain how publicly funded private schools are to be held accountable, though, when they don't even have publicly elected boards?

**Mr. Hancock:** The accountability that we're interested in is the accountability for the public money that's being invested and the educational results that are being achieved.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Taylor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, private schools in this province can use any criteria they want to turn students away, so how can the minister justify using public funds to support schools which systematically turn our children away?

**Mr. Hancock:** Mr. Speaker, the education of children is one of society's most important responsibilities. The public education system is one of the core jobs of government, and I think everyone in this House would agree that the education system in this province is among the best in the world. But the education system that's available to students in this province goes beyond simply the public education system or the public and separate education systems to include charter schools, which are also public, and private schools, and that broad range of choice makes it possible for every Alberta student to have the type of education process they need to be successful.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo*.

### 2:20 Test Wells for Carbon Storage and Capture

**Mr. Johnson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is about the Alberta government's funding of some test wells to be drilled by Shell. To the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology: given the immediate demands to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, why will we be giving money to oil and gas companies when the industry is profitable?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Horner:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a good question. An investment in carbon capture and storage or the research thereof is an investment in our environment for all Albertans. Capturing and storing CO<sub>2</sub> in geological formations really has the potential to significantly reduce the amount of our CO<sub>2</sub> footprint or emissions.

Shell is only one of many industry partners that our institutions are partnering up with to try to tackle these grand challenges for the benefit of all Albertans.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Johnson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My supplemental to the same minister: will the data from the test wells be used solely by Shell Canada?

**Mr. Horner:** Well, Mr. Speaker, the involvement of the Alberta Energy Research Institute here in the province ensures that whatever information we gain about storage capacity, about the technology that we're going to use to store large amounts of CO<sub>2</sub> in these formations, will be shared. It will be shared with other industries, will be shared with perhaps even other applications. There is an agreement in place, as there is with many of our joint venture initiatives with private companies, that allows us to utilize that information in a certain time period.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Johnson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Energy: given that last July the government announced a \$2 billion fund for carbon capture and sequestration, why is Alberta also paying \$6.6 million for test wells?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Knight:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, the \$2 billion fund that has been announced is an investment in putting steel in the ground, so to speak, for large-scale capital projects that would capture, transport, and store carbon. Research is also an extremely important aspect of any new technology. The money from the Alberta Energy Research Institute for test injection wells will provide important data elements for the technical parts of CCS. The investment is one of more than a dozen CCS research projects that AERI has invested in with stakeholders to ensure that Alberta is and will remain a world leader in carbon capture and storage.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

### **Police Funding**

*(continued)*

**Mr. Hehr:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week I asked the Premier a question about policing, and he gave a performance that would have been the envy of my grade 6 dodge ball league. To the Solicitor General. Based on the Premier's answer, the issues dealing with police funding have been addressed by the safe communities task force. Accordingly I ask you: are the police chiefs of both Calgary and Edmonton incorrect in their assessment that more provincial funds are needed immediately to hire additional police officers in order to keep Alberta citizens safe?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Lindsay:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What I will say is that I believe that the assessments of our chiefs of police right across the province are correct when they request more policemen on our streets, and we've committed to another 200 over the next two years.

That being said, in regard to some comments about a shell game, we know where the money went in regard to the funding that we presented through the municipal sustainability initiative. The councils of the municipalities set their priorities. The money is there, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Hehr:** So the money is there.

Police Chief Hanson showed up at a press conference with the mayor of Calgary saying that they're doing their part. They're offering additional funds. Why is the provincial government not doing its part and also committing funds for additional police officers?

**Mr. Lindsay:** Mr. Speaker, as I already mentioned, we are committing funds for additional police officers, and we're going to continue to do that. We've met with the chiefs of police across the province, and very shortly we'll be coming forward with an initiative to move forward with that.

**Mr. Hehr:** Will this initiative allow for more funds for more police officers on the street in the province of Alberta?

**Mr. Lindsay:** Mr. Speaker, stay tuned. It just may do that.

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

### **High-intensity Residential Fires**

**Mr. Horne:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week in the Terwillegar area of southwest Edmonton a fire with winds gusting to 50 kilometres an hour destroyed three homes and severely damaged three others in a blaze that cost \$2.3 million. Last summer a number of high-intensity residential fires occurred in other densely built communities across the province, again one of them in southwest Edmonton. In May this government made a commitment to take action to make Albertans safer from the effects of these fires. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: what action has been taken to protect Albertans from these types of fires?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Danyluk:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This government has taken decisive action. In fact, in May this government accepted 18 of 22 recommendations from the high-intensity residential fires report. We're working on implementing those recommendations. We have expedited the changes but at the same time taken the necessary time to make sure that it's right. We will improve the building and safety codes, developing an education/awareness campaign. There needs to be a balance between safety, affordability, and technically sound practices.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Horne:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: for the peace of mind of residents who live in this part of Edmonton, can you tell us when, specifically, the new building and safety codes will take effect?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Danyluk:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is leading the country in our strategy to address this issue. We are two

years ahead of anybody else, and the new standards will be in place in early 2009. Homes are safe. These changes will make them safer.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Horne:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for his response. A final question to the same minister: do you believe that these changes will prevent future occurrences such as the Terwillegar fire?

**Mr. Danyluk:** Well, Mr. Speaker, no, because there is no government regulation that can prevent fires from starting. The fire in Terwillegar is being investigated at this time as suspicious. The purpose of our regulations is that new changes will buy time for firefighters to respond and also for residents to get out of their homes.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

### Pipeline Security

**Ms Pastoor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The recent pipeline bombings in B.C. have led to concerns over the security of Alberta's network of pipelines. This weekend in Calgary top terrorism experts indicated that Alberta is a potential target for attacks that could disrupt economic stability. To the Solicitor General: in light of recent actions in B.C. and considering the conclusions of terrorism experts this weekend, is the government re-evaluating the threat level facing Alberta and taking appropriate action?

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

**Mr. Lindsay:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to reassure the hon. member that, yes, we do take these threats seriously. We are working with the folks out in British Columbia on the investigation out there. We continue to re-evaluate our matters regarding terrorism and the threats against this province on a continual basis, and we're right on top of it.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Ms Pastoor:** Thank you. Maybe I can ask the Minister of Energy: can the minister tell us what his ministry is doing to ensure that companies develop, implement, and maintain an effective pipeline security management program that addresses the risk factor to the facilities that are being protected?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Knight:** Well, yes, Mr. Speaker. In the first case, as has been demonstrated in the incidents in B.C., the fact of the matter is that these facilities are extremely robust. They're designed to withstand a tremendous amount, more physical abuse than what they would be normally accustomed to receiving. In the first instance, the regulatory regime that we have in place requires that these facilities are built in that manner, and most certainly our opportunities to be involved with industry with respect to the permitting and the applications for the construction of these projects include those types of robust opportunities.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Ms Pastoor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was really referring to the company's responsibility of providing the pipeline security.

Back to the Solicitor General if I might. Given that the threat assessment report his department received last spring regarding the training of industry-hired security personnel indicated that they have limited capabilities, can the minister ensure that the companies pay for sufficient personnel that have advanced training in security and antiterrorism that would protect Alberta's vital energy assets and, certainly by extension, Alberta's citizens?

2:30

**Mr. Lindsay:** I can assure the hon. member that we work with the oil and gas industry to ensure that we have plans in place in light of the unlikely event of a terrorist attack on our province. That being said, it's really up to the industry to hire whatever security they see fit, Mr. Speaker. We do work in co-operation with them. I will say that in regard to the incident that recently occurred out in British Columbia, we have assessed that, and we at this time see no need to raise our threat level in regard to terrorist activity in Alberta.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

### Special-needs Education Funding

**Mr. Weadick:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the summer I had the opportunity to speak to a number of parents and teachers about special-needs funding, and they're concerned about the levels of funding. Parents are concerned that there's not enough funding for their children and that the formula doesn't seem to address increases or fluctuating numbers of students in the schools. My questions are to the Minister of Education. Mr. Minister, what is the status of funding for special-needs students?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Funding for special needs is done on the basis of a per-student grant but based on the proportion of special-needs students in a jurisdiction, and that profile was developed a number of years ago. A number of school divisions were concerned that the demographic profile had changed and the funding formula hadn't caught up, so a review was done. What was discovered was that the system is actually seriously out of whack. In other words, the information gathered shows that more than half of the students that are being funded actually do not conform to the policy. Obviously, the policy needs to be fixed.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Weadick:** Well, thank you very much. I'm really happy to hear that we're going to fix that.

My first supplemental is to the same minister. Can the minister tell us if there's a process for the schools to get increased funding during this school year to meet the needs of increased enrolment of special-needs kids?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I mentioned that the policy needs to be fixed. We've engaged a steering committee to follow a review called Setting the Direction for Special Education in Alberta, and that review is currently out there consulting with stakeholders and parents and others in the system to bring back to us a recommendation for the new policy framework. What we've indicated to

school boards is that we'll maintain the current funding profile until that work is done, but if there's extra stress on the system, if they can show that they have more students than there were funded under the profile, we'll look at it.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Weadick:** Thank you very much. My final, then, is: with this new review taking place, how can my constituents and parents have input into the process for the new funding formula?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There has been a steering committee established. It will be supported by a stakeholder working group representing 14 different stakeholder groups. We're going to be going out in meetings right across the province to work with parents, with students, with educators, with education assistants, with medical personnel, and all others involved in this process to get the full range of consultation done. There'll be a spot in that consultation for every parent who wants to be involved in the discussion to be involved.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

#### International Financial Crisis

**Ms DeLong:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Many of my constituents are concerned about the global economic turbulence and how it might impact Alberta. My first question is to the Minister of Finance and Enterprise. How is this turmoil affecting the province?

**Ms Evans:** Mr. Speaker, we are not immune, but we still have a very strong economy, an anticipated 2.6 per cent economic growth this year. It's down a little bit from our budget prediction of 2.9 per cent. We have every evidence that economically people continue to invest in Alberta. Just this morning when I met with a group, they told me that the biggest need we have in Alberta is more labour, and under those circumstances with very low unemployment you know that we're very well positioned.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Ms DeLong:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the same minister. Why is the province in a better position to withstand this economic crisis than other jurisdictions?

**Ms Evans:** Mr. Speaker, when you look at the operating revenues within our budget, some 41 per cent relate to oil and gas. So with 85 per cent of exports to the U.S. predominantly in the energy sector, we've got a very strong opportunity to keep ourselves afloat no matter what. We've got banks with better regulations, better fundamentals than they have in the United States. When you look across the country, we were in better shape than anybody else was at the beginning of all of this market turmoil because our debt was paid off.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Ms DeLong:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The final question again to the same minister: is the minister suggesting that Alberta is immune to the effects of recent global financial developments?

**Ms Evans:** Mr. Speaker, to the extent that there is a correlation on energy prices with every dollar change in oil – and that's a U.S. dollar on the west Texas intermediate – we have some \$138 million worth of fluctuation if it's annualized, so we're always in a situation where we have a more volatile economy than other places. But while we're still the second-largest safe, secure source of supply in the world, we are going to have that tremendous advantage, and we should be proud of what we're doing with it.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

#### Arlington Apartments

**Mr. Lukaszuk:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Preserving Alberta's heritage is one of this government's mandates, and in doing so, often we assign historic designations to buildings. The Arlington Apartments building in Edmonton, built in 1909, had been assigned such designation not only by the province but also by the city. Now the provincial designation has been rescinded. Can the minister advise me: why would a designation be rescinded for a historical building as such?

**Mr. Blackett:** Mr. Speaker, Arlington Apartments was designated a provincial historic resource for its representation of dynamic growth in Edmonton shortly before the First World War as well as for its Edwardian classical architecture. However, on April 5, 2005, a fire severely damaged the building. Since the fire the city and the province have been assessing whether the site will still communicate its heritage value. Only facades of the building remain, and there were concerns that the building is unstable. To ensure public safety, the province's historic resource designation was removed to allow for demolition of the site.

**Mr. Lukaszuk:** Mr. Speaker, many buildings are reconstructed after being burned or bombed, et cetera. What is the point of assigning historical designation if it then can be rescinded and the building be demolished?

**Mr. Blackett:** Mr. Speaker, the provincial historic designation protects Alberta's valuable historic resources. To qualify for designation, the historic place must be situated in the original location, be associated with an important aspect of Alberta's natural or human history, and, most importantly, retain the physical site features necessary to convey their significance. So much of the Arlington was destroyed in the fire. There is great value in our province's historic designations, but we need to balance the preservation of the resource with the cost of maintaining the resource and the interests of public safety.

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

#### Gasoline Pricing

**Mr. Benito:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Energy: could you please explain the variable factors in gasoline pricing and if the gasoline pricing in Alberta is reflective of the current North American market?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Knight:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Clearly, gasoline prices are affected by the price of crude oil, but that is not the only factor in pricing that we see at the pumps. The price that we pay for gasoline at the pumps in Alberta and other places across the country

also includes the cost, of course, of refining, the cost of the operation of a distribution and delivery system, and federal and provincial taxes. Gasoline prices are determined by the forces of supply and demand, and they vary between provinces and even some neighbourhoods. Rates we pay . . .

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Benito:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the same minister. I have heard from some constituents that Canadians in some parts of Ontario are paying comparatively lower gasoline prices in contrast to Alberta. Why are gasoline prices currently lower in southern Ontario?

**Mr. Knight:** Well, Mr. Speaker, as I said before, it depends a lot on the local situation at the time and competition in the markets. Near major cities in southern Ontario, for example, there could be a lot of service stations. It might create a little more competition. These things are competitive across Canada, and certainly Alberta does continue to have amongst the lowest prices for gasoline in Canada.

2:40

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Benito:** Thank you. My final question is to the same minister. It has been suggested that increasing our provincial refining capacity could alleviate some of the pressures that lead to higher gasoline prices. How can we increase this capacity?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Knight:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I had mentioned earlier, actually last week, we're working with carbon capture and storage here to increase our opportunities for value-added in Alberta. Certainly, we hope that our involvement in that end of the business will encourage additional refining capacity in the province, which will of course create a better situation for fuel supply and also create some additional jobs and benefits for Albertans at the same time.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, that was 21 sets of questions today, with a total of 119 questions and responses.

### Statement by the Speaker

#### MPs Elected as Alberta MLAs

**The Speaker:** Now, we do have time for a little historical vignette. Last week I talked about individuals who had served in this House, 791 in the history of Alberta, and the origin of where they had been prior to becoming a member of this Assembly. In our history of 103 years there have been 10 Members of Parliament – that is, of the Canadian House of Commons – who subsequently became Members of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta.

In chronological order the first was Joseph Tweed Shaw. He was a Member for Calgary-West, a Labour member who served in the Canadian House of Commons from 1921 to 1926, then in 1926 returned to Alberta and served in this Assembly as a Liberal for the constituency of Bow Valley.

The second was Alfred Speakman. He served in the Canadian House of Commons from 1921 to 1935, his first term from 1921 to 1926 representing Red Deer as a Progressive and then the second and third terms, from 1926 to 1935, representing Red Deer as a member of the United Farmers of Alberta. Then he came back to Alberta and served in this Assembly from 1940 to 1943 as an Independent for Red Deer.

John Charles Landeryou served in the 18th Parliament of Canada, from 1935 to 1940, representing Calgary-East as a Social Credit, then came to Alberta and served from 1944 to 1971 as a Social Credit member representing the constituency of Lethbridge.

Ernest George Hansell served in the House of Commons. He served the constituency of Macleod from 1935 to 1940 as a Social Credit member, then from 1940 to 1945 the designation he used was New Democrat. From 1945 to 1957 he was Social Credit, and then he came to this Legislature and served from 1959 to 1963 for the constituency of Okotoks-High River as a Social Credit member.

Charles Edward Johnston served from 1935 to 1958, representing Bow River as a member of the Social Credit Party federally. Then he served from 1959 to 1967 representing the constituency of Calgary-Bowness as a Social Credit member.

Ambrose Holowach served the constituency of Edmonton-East as a Social Credit member from 1953 to 1958. Then he returned to this Assembly and served from 1959 to 1971, representing Edmonton-Centre as a member of the Social Credit Party.

Hugh Macarthur Horner, the father of one of our distinguished members, served as a Member of Parliament for the constituency of Jasper-Edson from 1958 to 1967 as a Progressive Conservative. Then he served in this Assembly representing the constituency of Lac Ste. Anne from 1967 to 1971 as a Progressive Conservative and then from 1971 to 1979 served the constituency of Barrhead as a member of that same party.

Peter Elzinga served in the Canadian House of Commons from 1974 to 1986, representing Pembina as a Progressive Conservative. Then he came back to Alberta and served in this Assembly from 1986 to 1993, representing Sherwood Park as a member of the Progressive Conservative Party.

Stanley Schumacher served in the Canadian House of Commons from 1968 to 1979 representing the constituency of Palliser as a Progressive Conservative, then came back to Alberta and served in this Assembly from 1986 to 1997 representing Drumheller as a Progressive Conservative, including one term as Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta.

The last individual, the 10th individual to have done this in our history, was Ian McClelland, who served in the Canadian House of Commons from 1993 to 1997 for the constituency of Edmonton-Southwest as a Reform member. Then he served in the 36th federal Parliament from 1997 to the year 2000 in the same constituency, Edmonton-Southwest, but with two different party names. He served during that time as a Reform member then a Canadian Reform Conservative Alliance member. Then in 2001 he was elected to this Assembly and served till 2004 representing the constituency of Edmonton-Rutherford as a Progressive Conservative member.

### Introduction of Bills

#### Bill 38

#### Securities Amendment Act, 2008

**Mr. Fawcett:** Mr. Speaker, today I rise to request leave to introduce Bill 38, the Securities Amendment Act, 2008.

Alberta has been leading in the development of a passport system for securities regulation. A passport system for securities regulation is essentially a free trade agreement between provinces based on mutual recognition of regulatory systems. The amendments to the Securities Act will allow Alberta's legislation to be consistent with this passport system, reducing the regulatory burden for Alberta's securities industry.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 38 read a first time]

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

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 38 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

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

### **Bill 39 Court Statutes Amendment Act, 2008**

**Mr. Denis:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to request leave to introduce Bill 39, the Court Statutes Amendment Act, 2008.

This bill includes amendments to the Provincial Court Act which will clarify the types of civil disputes that can be heard in provincial court. They also will more clearly define the processes for resolving disputes through the provincial court for civil claims of \$25,000 or less. Bill 39 will help make Alberta's civil justice system more effective, efficient, and accessible.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 39 read a first time]

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

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 39 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

### **Tabling Returns and Reports**

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

**Mr. Anderson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table a petition to the House against the restrictions that are imposed on multi-employer pension plans on behalf of the hon. Member for Stony Plain, Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security.

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

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three good-news postsecondary announcement tablings today. The first is to do with research in action, a program of the University of Calgary, and I'd like to highlight biomedical engineering specifically. The University of Calgary has become world renowned for its development of a robotic surgical arm, which basically takes science fiction and brings it into our modern-day reality.

My second good-news announcement with regard to the University of Calgary is that on September 3 a number of members of this House were in attendance when the University of Calgary launched Canada's fifth veterinary program, that is happening just outside of town in the Spy Hill area. We were treated to a wonderful tour of a very modern facility that is going to be a real gem for this province.

2:50

My third announcement has to do with a presentation that the minister of advanced education, the Member for Calgary-Hays, and I had an opportunity to witness, and that was at Bow Valley College, which is currently being renovated and expanded. I must admit that we all had trouble paying attention as the demolition was taking place across the street. This is another wonderful, good-news announcement for postsecondary in Calgary.

I would encourage the government to make a good-news announcement for the Alberta College of Art and Design with regard . . .

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. [interjection] The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has the floor.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have one tabling today. It's a letter dated October 17, 2008, from our office in Edmonton-Gold Bar to the hon. minister of finance requesting all the details for the past 10 years for the loans that have been written off by the Alberta Treasury Branches. They total in the 10 years \$368 million.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Anderson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have an additional tabling. I recently visited Ralph McCall elementary school in Airdrie and met with teacher Brian Jackson and his sixth-grade class. They shared their good ideas on bicycle safety and presented me with nine well-researched letters with very compelling statistics and arguments on why bicycle helmets should be mandatory for all riders. I would like to table these letters asking the government to look at expanding the bicycle helmet law to all ages and making it mandatory for all people to wear a helmet when they ride a bike.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

### **Orders of the Day**

#### **Written Questions**

[Pursuant to temporary Standing Order 34(3.2) the Clerk read the following written question, which had been accepted]

#### **Farm Fuel Benefit Program**

Q20. Dr. Taft:  
How many new applicants were registered in the farm fuel benefit program each year from April 1, 1997, to May 8, 2008?

**The Clerk:** Pursuant to temporary Standing Order 34(3.1) the remaining written questions are deemed to stand and retain their places.

#### **Motions for Returns**

[Pursuant to temporary Standing Order 34(3.2) the Clerk read the following motions for returns, which had been accepted]

#### **Degree-granting by Postsecondary Institutions**

M9. Mr. Taylor:  
A return showing a copy of all documents regarding the degree-granting status of postsecondary institutions in the province, excluding the University of Alberta and the University of Calgary, from January 1, 2003, to May 6, 2008.

#### **Federal Child Care Assistance**

M10. Mr. Chase:  
A return showing a copy of all documents detailing the spending of federal monies transferred to Alberta's Ministry of Children and Youth Services for the purposes of creating child care spaces across the province.

### Fatalities among Children in Care

M11. Mr. Chase:

A return showing a copy of the report to the ministry of children's services reviewing conditions surrounding cases of fatalities of children under provincial care between January 1, 2007, and January 1, 2008.

**The Clerk:** Pursuant to temporary Standing Order 34(3.1) motions for returns are deemed to stand and retain their places with the exception of motions for returns 8, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, and 17.

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

### Student Loans

M8. Mr. Taylor moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of all documents regarding Alberta student loan statistics from September 1, 2003, to May 1, 2008.

**Mr. Taylor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What we're looking for here is to see if there is evidence of increasing student debt loads. We believe that making it easier to go into debt while you're a student is not necessarily doing students any favours.

Affordability has been throughout that period that I mentioned, September 1, 2003, to May 1, 2008, a real issue for a great number of postsecondary students in the province of Alberta. Part of the response has been to allow students to go further into debt in this province, and it doesn't really address the fundamental affordability question. What it does is leave students at the end of their however-many years of postsecondary career with an even larger debt that they have to pay off.

There are anecdotal stories, Mr. Speaker, that are alarming. I'll give you as one example the number of stories that we've heard about medical residents who've chosen to pursue medical specialties as a career rather than family practice – and we're very short of family physicians in this province – simply because they look at the debt that they've rung up at the end of medical school and they don't believe that with the kind of income they can expect to make as a family doctor, they can afford to carry that kind of debt load along with their practice. That's one example.

That's why we're asking for this information, Mr. Speaker. I will take my seat at that point.

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

**Mr. Horner:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to move that Motion for a Return 8 be rejected. The reason for this is because the information being requested is not specific enough for the department to know what information is being provided. The Alberta student loan statistics are available in many, many forms: jurisdictional, location and type of educational institution, demographics, marital status, family size, total number of recipients and total value of awards, graduating debt profiles of learners accessing those loans, funding disbursements date, fiscal year, date cashed.

In addition to Alberta student loans postsecondary students may also receive provincial grants, bursaries, scholarships as well as federal loans, grants, and bursaries. There are high volumes of reports that reference Alberta student loan statistics that are generated daily, weekly, monthly, annually, and based on the disbursement dates, the fiscal years, or the dates cashed.

It would have been very helpful if the hon. member could have provided a little more clarity within the request. If the intent is to figure out what the average debt load of Alberta students is, Mr. Speaker, there are a number of reports that are done quarterly, annually by a number of different groups that show over the past few years that our student debt load in Alberta is actually declining in some vocations. We're very comparable across the country. In fact, on the medical graduate side there was a report recently out that showed that we had amongst the lowest student debt in the country.

I think, Mr. Speaker, that if we could get a sharper clarity next time on the written request, we may be able to comply. But having said and noted all of the various places that all of this information can be, it's much too wide a swath.

**The Speaker:** Additional members to participate?

The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie to conclude the debate.

**Mr. Taylor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, of course I'm disappointed. I guess we'll take another run at it next time around with a little more clarity, then, and see what excuses the minister can come up with next time.

[Motion for a Return 8 lost]

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

### Funding for Private Schools

M12. Mr. Chase moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of all documents related to the government's considerations surrounding proposed increases of funding to private schools.

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The reason for this request is that there has been no public debate that we're aware of. It didn't come up as an election item. It just basically appeared, and we would like to get an understanding of the history that led up to this decision to increase dramatically the funding for private schools, not only the per-pupil grant but specifically the major increase from zero to 70 per cent for private infrastructure.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Education, Government House Leader.

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the government I would have to ask the House to reject this motion. There's certainly some information that the hon. member might want to have relative to the elements that have been put forward by various parties with respect to the need for this change in funding. Normally I would try and work with a member to adapt a question so it could be answered, but when the phrasing of the question is "a copy of all documents," it's difficult to figure out how to amend that question in this context to make it so that it's actually deliverable. We cannot deliver all documents because, of course, that includes briefings to the minister and briefings to cabinet, which fall within the realm of confidential documents, which I'm honour bound not to disclose.

**The Speaker:** Others? If I call on the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, this closes the debate. Does anybody else want to participate?

Then the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.



3:00

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you very much. To the hon. Minister of Education. I understand to a very small degree his quandary, when he defines "all documents" as including briefings. I'm very aware that we're not subject to receiving those briefings, and therefore I never anticipated that they would be brought forward. However, the ministry and the government brought up this dramatic increase in private school funding without any debate in the House. We have not seen any type of public consultation, at least in terms of forums or an appeal on a website of the government to send submissions as to how they felt about increasing private school funding. Therefore, in the desire for the type of transparency and accountability that the Premier has been advocating for all his caucus members, the request was made. Clearly, the winners in this particular circumstance are a small percentage of students educated in private schools, and the losers are the public in general, that has to pay for these increases to a very limited number of individuals with limited charter requirements and exclusionary practices.

I'm sorry that I'll not be receiving any of this particular information, but if the minister would like to send me what he deems to be pertinent, that would be appreciated. Thank you.

[Motion for a Return 12 lost]

#### Provincial Nominee Program

M13. Mr. MacDonald moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of all reports or other related documents regarding the progression and expansion of the Ministry of Employment and Immigration's provincial nominee program.

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would urge that we receive this information from the Ministry of Employment and Immigration. Certainly, there has been a lot of money spent in the department to sort of improve not only the delivery of that program but others as well. This is a government that wants to increase its role and influence on immigration into this province. Whenever one compares the provincial nominee program to date in Alberta with British Columbia and with Manitoba and Saskatchewan, it is interesting to note that Alberta falls far, far behind both British Columbia and Manitoba as far as attracting new Canadians to this province under that program.

I would certainly agree that we need to expand and spruce up this program. I think we need to eliminate the temporary foreign worker program and encourage permanent immigration not only by the worker but by their families into this province. I know the temporary foreign worker program doesn't do that. We had a good look last summer at the comparisons between the provinces that I spoke about earlier: Manitoba, B.C., and Saskatchewan. Certainly, we fall far behind those provinces. I would think that this information would certainly shed light on which direction the Minister of Employment and Immigration is going with this program.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Renner:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to respond on behalf of the Minister of Employment and Immigration. The government is recommending that the members reject this motion. In a similar manner to the previous request of the Minister of Education this motion is extremely broad in that it requests all

reports and other related documents regarding the progression and expansion of the provincial nominee program. The request is, clearly, extremely broad and includes information that was submitted in confidence.

I also would point out to members of the House that information on Alberta's provincial nominee program and its progression is clearly available on the Employment and Immigration website. For that reason I urge all members to reject this motion.

**The Speaker:** Additional participants? If I call on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar to speak, that will close the debate. No further?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar to conclude the debate.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I must say publicly to the hon. Minister of Environment that I'm very disappointed in that response. This motion is not vague. Surely, the government can provide this detail. If this is a government that claims that it's open and transparent, it should provide that information. We're using significant tax dollars now to expand those programs, and if citizens are to be assured that they're getting value for their money, we should receive this information. Again, the only reason I can think of why the government may be reluctant to provide this information is the embarrassment they have because their provincial nominee program fails miserably when you compare it to what the British Columbia government is doing and the province of Manitoba is doing. I think this is a matter of political embarrassment for the government, and I'm very disappointed that we're not getting the information requested.

Thank you.

[Motion for a Return 13 lost]

#### Temporary Foreign Workers

M14. Mr. MacDonald moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of all documents detailing the Ministry of Employment and Immigration's findings surrounding work conditions faced by temporary foreign workers which led to the establishment of special advisory offices in the province.

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** I was getting ready for this Motion for a Return 14. I really appreciate the support from Edmonton-Centre on the previous one. I really do.

When we look at the temporary foreign worker program and we look at the latest deal that was signed, another memorandum of understanding, this time with the Republic of the Philippines to ease labour shortages in the province and ease the flow of Filipino citizens to work in this province, this is only the latest example of the temporary foreign worker program and the expansion of it. We have to recognize that while that one specific agreement may ease labour shortages in the short term, just like the whole temporary foreign worker program, there are many concerns regarding whether or not the workers will be treated properly and given the necessary supports when they're here in Alberta.

A great concern of not only the Official Opposition, Mr. Speaker, but citizens throughout the province, whether they're social workers, whether they're members of labour groups, whether they're members of church groups, is the state of the temporary foreign worker program in this province. This is a program that's got a long list of issues, including the lack of proper supports for temporary foreign workers in the province.

The government should be commended for opening the two special advisory offices in Alberta. I understand that there is more activity going on throughout the province outside those two main offices. Foreign workers need and deserve proper supports from this government if we're going to recruit and bring them in here. When you look at their visa and you see the restrictions and limitations that these workers have placed on them, I think it's deplorable. If they have a bad employer, they can't change. There's very limited amount of change that can occur, if they can find another employer, with the labour market opinion. How are these folks to know that they're eligible to do that? They're supposed to work for the one employer, do the one job that it states on the visa, and that's it. They can't even take a training or an upgrading course.

3:10

I'm sorry. We're not doing enough to ensure that the Employment Standards Code is understood by these workers. We're certainly not doing enough to ensure that the occupational health and safety statute and the regulations are enforced. Perhaps we could get an interpreter and ask many of the temporary foreign workers from China who were working at the CNRL site in Fort McMurray when the tank collapsed if OH and S and the Employment Standards Code were a part of their job orientation.

Now, the services that are available to temporary foreign workers are not necessarily available in their own language. I believe and I think all hon. members of this House believe that better protection is needed for temporary foreign workers, especially regarding the terms of employment, the contracts they sign, and the fees that are gathered by these brokers. I think this government should just shut down entirely this broker system that has developed. It's very disappointing. I think it's just a mild form, unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, of human trafficking, to allow these brokers to get money from these individuals. Lavish promises are made in other countries, and those promises are not kept when the temporary foreign worker arrives in Alberta. The brokers: shut them down. If we're going to have this program at all, let's run it through our Canadian embassies. There's no reason why these temporary foreign workers should be paying as much as \$6,000 U.S. to get teed up for a job here. Uh-uh. It's wrong. It's totally wrong.

I'm disappointed that to date I have found little evidence of any government monitoring, representation for the workers, and enforcement of contracts for existing temporary foreign workers. The Alberta Federation of Labour to their credit has dedicated funds for a lawyer to protect the rights and interests of temporary foreign workers, and the lawyer is overworked. [interjection] Maybe the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont, if he has any spare time, could go over and help that individual out and defend the interests and protect temporary foreign workers from additional exploitation in this province.

In summary, Mr. Speaker, those would be the reasons why we are requesting this information under Motion for a Return 14. I certainly hope that the government will comply and provide a copy of all documents requested.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Would all hon. members in favour of Motion for a Return 14 as proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton . . .

**Mr. MacDonald:** We need a response.

**The Speaker:** Oh, I'm sorry. I thought you'd concluded the debate already.

**Mr. MacDonald:** No.

**The Speaker:** Oh, you were just moving it. Sorry.

**Mr. Renner:** Mr. Speaker, like you I was under the impression that perhaps he was coming to a conclusion of what the government response was going to be before we actually responded. I won't disappoint him. I'm pleased to respond on behalf of the Minister of Employment and Immigration and recommend to the members that this motion also be rejected.

This motion, like the previous motion, requests all documents detailing the ministry's findings surrounding the working conditions faced by temporary foreign workers which led to the establishment of the temporary worker advisory office. Like the previous request it's clearly extremely broad. It requests information that was either submitted in confidence or is otherwise of a very personal nature. I also again remind all members that information on Alberta's temporary foreign worker advisory office is already publicly available on the Employment and Immigration website.

For that reason, Mr. Speaker, I recommend that members reject this motion.

**The Speaker:** All right, hon. members. Additional speakers on this subject matter? I apologize for jumping the gun.

I'll call now on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar to conclude the debate.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I'm very, very disappointed in the hon. Minister of Environment's answer. Certainly, this program hasn't turned out the way the government initially thought. It's a program that has been one problem after another. I think the reason why this request has been rejected, again, is political embarrassment. We don't know what's happening to these temporary foreign workers once they get here, if they're being laid off or they're being fired. We have no idea what happens to them. If things were working out, certainly the social agencies wouldn't be expanding their programs to provide services and counselling and guidance to these workers. We could soon have over 70,000 temporary foreign workers in this province.

When the government is unwilling – I'm not saying they're unable; I'm saying they're unwilling – to co-operate and provide this information to the public, again, it is another symbol of a very closed government that does not want any scrutiny of their programs and the delivery of those programs. The last thing I can say, Mr. Speaker, in conclusion, after the rejection of this motion for a return is that this is not an open and it is not a transparent government, and I'm disappointed to say that.

Thank you.

[Motion for a Return 14 lost]

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

#### Nuclear Power Expert Panel

M15. Ms Blakeman moved on behalf of Ms Notley that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of all documents, including but not limited to memos, letters, faxes, e-mails, and notes, relating to the appointment of the expert panel on nuclear energy referred to by the Minister of Energy in the Assembly on Wednesday, April 23, 2008.

**Mr. Liepert:** It's the first step.

**Ms Blakeman:** It's a courtesy. I know that's a foreign concept to

the members on the other side, but I thought it might be a courtesy. I guess it's a little disappointing to see the reaction from the members opposite.

**Mr. Liepert:** First step to a merger.

**Ms Blakeman:** So what? You can't offer someone a courtesy here?

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre is recognized. Let's pay attention.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. I truly am astounded by how discourteous members in this House are occasionally.

When we look at the motion that has been brought forward by the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, I'll be interested to see what the response of the government is to this particular one because the complaints in previous ones have been that all documents were asked for. Well, in this one all documents are also asked for, and then there is a proviso:

including but not limited to memos, letters, faxes, e-mails, and notes, relating to the appointment of the expert panel on nuclear energy referred to by the Minister of Energy in the Assembly on Wednesday, April 23, 2008.

There has been quite a bit of specificity supplied in this motion for a return. I am interested in the information, as I'm sure many members in this Assembly are, and I look forward to the government's response to see whether they have the courage to release it.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Energy.

3:20

**Mr. Knight:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to speak to Motion for a Return 15, in fact, which I recommend to the Assembly be rejected. As members will be aware, the motion seeks a copy of all documents, memos, faxes, e-mails, and notes pertaining to my appointment last spring of an expert panel on nuclear energy.

If the panel had some sort of an advisory capacity, Mr. Speaker, or was making recommendations on policy or legislation, then I could perhaps see some merit in the request. The member, for instance, might want to know specific questions it might be asked to consider or the scope of the panel's ability to influence government policy and with whom it would therefore consult, but that is expressly not what is in the panel's mandate.

Instead, Mr. Speaker, the panel's mandate is to simply provide comprehensive and objective research, which the government can share with Albertans to begin a discussion about whether there is a place for nuclear energy in Alberta's future and, if so, under what conditions. Specifically, in Ministerial Order 31/2008 it says, "The Panel shall prepare a balanced and objective Report for the Government of Alberta on factual issues pertinent to the use of nuclear power to supply electricity in Alberta." This is reinforced in a letter dated May 20 of this year to the members of the expert panel in which my department's deputy minister reiterates that Alberta remains open-minded on the issue of nuclear power and that full consideration of both the potential challenges and advantages will need to be considered and reflected in the report.

Mr. Speaker, in the Assembly tomorrow I will table this ministerial order, which establishes the membership terms of reference and the term of the expert panel. As well, although it pertains only to the remuneration of the panel, I will table Ministerial Order 46/2008, and I would be happy to also table a copy of the deputy minister's

letter of May 20 to the panel members. This expert panel is comprised of individuals who are accomplished and acknowledged experts in their chosen fields. I'm confident that the report they will deliver to me will provide a sound basis for discussion going forward.

I know that the hon. member across the way has clearly made up her mind on the issue. If she wants to advocate that particular position to Albertans, she is certainly within her rights to do so, Mr. Speaker. As members well know, the Premier and I have committed to an open dialogue with Albertans with respect to nuclear power, and that is exactly what we shall do.

Mr. Speaker, in light of the fact that the scope of this expert panel's work is not to make recommendations or to propose policy and the ministerial orders I have made available to the Legislature, I recommend that Motion for a Return 15 be rejected.

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, I'm disappointed to hear the remarks from the hon. Minister of Energy. Certainly, if this hon. minister and the Premier and the entire government was committed to an open dialogue, I think "a copy of all documents, including but not limited to memos, letters, faxes, e-mails, and notes, relating to the appointment of the expert panel on nuclear energy referred to by the Minister of Energy" would be laid before this Assembly at the request of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Certainly, when we look at the mandate of this expert panel, there are significant issues being discussed: the cost of this proposal, how many megawatts of electricity would be generated, whether Lac Cardinal has sufficient water to maintain over a long period of time the cooling capacity for the plant, the role of the regulatory process in Alberta. We've never dealt with any kind of an atomic reactor before, particularly one that it's been suggested could be as much as 1,100 megawatts.

Certainly, since April 23, 2008, when the hon. Minister of Energy referred to this expert panel, the world has changed. I would only remind the House, Mr. Speaker, of how the availability of credit has changed. When we're looking at the construction costs, which are significant for a reactor of this type, or twin reactors, they will be in the billions of dollars. In other jurisdictions it's the taxpayer who is ponying up the cash not only for the construction, through loan guarantees, but also even for the insurance for these reactors. In light of how the credit markets have changed since April 23, 2008, I would consider the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona's request prudent, if for nothing else than because the taxpayers may be set up to guarantee the construction costs on this proposed facility, and the taxpayers have every right to know if that's part of this expert panel's mandate and role.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Any additional hon. member?

Then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona to close the debate.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I'm not surprised to hear the response from the minister. It was more or less I think what I was expecting based on the responses that I'd heard from other ministers today. As a matter of fact, I suspect that the same person from Public Affairs wrote them all because they sound pretty similar to me.

I'm very happy on behalf of my colleague from Edmonton-Strathcona to receive the documents he has offered to table and

thank him for that. A question and a prod to the minister as to when we could expect the report that was commissioned by the government to be released publicly or at least to members of the Assembly. The taxpayers did pay for the report. I think they're entitled to have a look at it.

Finally, I'm curious on what basis he makes his assumption that either I or the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona have made up our minds on this particular issue. There was certainly nothing in my statements that indicated that, and I have no way of knowing what Edmonton-Strathcona's views are on this particular subject. I wonder how he does. Perhaps the script from Public Affairs did not give him the flexibility to anticipate my moving this motion on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Again, thank you very much for the information he has offered. I'll call the question.

[Motion for a Return 15 lost]

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

### Farm Fuel Benefit Program

M16. Mr. MacDonald moved on behalf of Dr. Taft that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of all documents from January 1, 1997, to May 8, 2008, including but not limited to reports, studies, correspondence, presentations, and evaluations, pertaining to the administration of applications and renewals to the Alberta farm fuel benefit program.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, this program has come under significant interest in the last 10 years. There would be in excess of a billion dollars spent on this program. If one were to look at it on an annual basis, over \$100 million a year in the two portions of this program. We need to get further details on what audits have been done on this program. It has come up before in the Assembly. The answers that have been provided by the hon. minister of agriculture have certainly not been adequate. Taxpayers have every right to get that information.

We know there are more farmers on the program than there are farmers that are eligible because of the criteria which indicate that if you're making less than \$10,000 per year net income, I believe it is, Mr. Speaker, you would be ineligible. We hear and we see where there are roughly 40,000 farmers who would meet that criteria, yet there were last year over 60,000 people getting a benefit of one sort or another from the farm fuel benefit program.

If you look at the annual report for the department of agriculture for 2007-08, we can indicate from there that there are still a significant number of people on the program. I cannot find in that report – and it's interesting because you could find it before; in fact, it was a newspaper reporter who came up with the figure. I've had a good look in the 2007-08 agriculture and food annual report for the details around the Alberta farm and fuel benefit program. I can't find them. There's just a reference to it here and the fact that eligible producers receive a rebate of 9 cents a litre on fuel purchases and a rebate of 6 cents per litre on diesel. We can see where one portion of the program has a fund allocation of \$32.8 million, and that doesn't include the part of it that is netted off taxes under Alberta Finance.

3:30

When you look at the details that are provided, it's certainly inadequate. This motion for a return, requested by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, would clear up a lot of the unanswered

questions. Certainly, I think we could administer this program tighter. If there are freeloaders on the program, get rid of them, and increase the amount of rebate to eligible farmers so that they can reduce their input costs. When we look at the annual report that was recently provided, one of the first things that the minister talks about is high input costs, and it mentions the price of fuel. So if we're going to allocate these dollars to reducing farmers' fuel costs, let's tighten the program up so that real farmers can get full benefit, and if there are people who are freeloading on this program, let's get them off it. One of the ways of doing this is by responding positively to Motion for a Return 16.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Renner:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today on behalf of the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. Members will note that there is an amendment that's proposed to this motion. I believe that all members have copies on their desks. The amendment was provided to the opposition. In fact, it was discussed with the opposition in advance to try and determine as best as possible what information the opposition is seeking with this motion.

The motion in its form right now is so broad as to be almost impossible. It requests

documents from January 1, 1997, to May 8, 2008, including, but not limited to, reports, studies, correspondence, presentations, and evaluations pertaining to the administration of applications and renewals.

Mr. Speaker, the amendment will attempt to draw down the unlimited aspects of the motion and replace the words that I just brought forward and substitute the following:

progress and follow-up reports on the status of the recommendations presented in the Alberta farm fuel benefit allowance 1998 renewal audit report, dated June 3, 1999, produced by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, including backgrounder documents produced since June 3, 1999, relating . . .

And then it goes on.

The motion as amended would then read:

That an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of all progress and follow-up reports on the status of the recommendations presented in the Alberta farm fuel benefit allowance 1998 renewal audit report, dated June 3, 1999, produced by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, including the backgrounder documents produced since June 3, 1999, relating to the Alberta farm fuel benefit program.

Mr. Speaker, I think that with the acceptance of this amendment by the members of this House, the government will be in a position to provide most, if not all, of the information that the opposition are seeking.

**The Speaker:** I take it, hon. minister, that in your overview there was a motion to move this that was inherent.

**Mr. Renner:** That's correct.

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have an additional question for the hon. Minister of Environment at this time. Certainly, I will read this information that will be provided if this amendment is approved by the House, but will that information include the Auditor General's work? The Auditor General in this

time period going back to 1999 has in a number of his annual reports made comment regarding the farm fuel benefit allowance, and I would like to know if the Auditor's work will be included in the information that will be released if this amendment is approved by the Assembly.

**The Speaker:** Well, it's not normal to have a response permitted at this point in time.

Others on the amendment?

Shall I call the question?

**Hon. Members:** Question.

[Motion on amendment carried]

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar to conclude the debate on the motion as amended.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll just say at this point that this is an ongoing issue and concern for the taxpayers of this province, and I look forward, along with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, to going over this information. I'm sure our researchers will be very anxious to get a look at it, and we'll see what progress has been made in cleaning up that program.

Thank you.

[Motion for a Return 16 as amended carried]

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

### Zoo Standards

M17. Ms Blakeman moved on behalf of Dr. Taft that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of all documents regarding zoo standards and their implementation and enforcement from January 1, 2003, to May 8, 2008.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This is specifically around the changes. There have been some new standards that were implemented. I remember this because in 2003, I think, I was briefly the critic for this area, and there was a great deal of concern being expressed around the lack of monitoring and the lack of enforcement around those standards for zoos. In fact, the minister at the time had invited me as the critic to go with him to examine some of the particularly controversial sites, and I agreed to do that. Although I followed up several times with the minister over the summer, eventually they responded in the fall that they would not be taking those on-site visits and, in fact, would not be following through on that.

The frustration at the time was that the government could see that standards were not being enforced. They could see that there were problems. All kinds of people were supplying actual documentation of standards not being applied, of rules being broken, yet the government kept allowing them another six-month renewal of their licence. It was very frustrating because then the same thing just went on for another six months. Someone would go out, the same standards would not be applied, and it just went round and around. I think that people who are advocates on behalf of the animals in these zoos were very frustrated that the government wouldn't do anything.

3:40

We did get new standards. What we're hearing now is that the government has been ramping up the enforcement on the municipal

zoos, and I'm interested to see whether, in fact, we are having the same level of rigour applied on those that are outside of the municipal zoos and animal farms.

This is an issue that is very important to a number of people in Alberta, and I would like to see what is happening around monitoring and implementing those new standards and the enforcement on those that fall short of what's expected. So I ask the government to please provide us with this information and to agree to our Motion for a Return 17.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Dr. Morton:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I recommend that this motion for a return be rejected for the following reasons. Like many of the other motions for returns we've heard, it's very sweeping in what it's looking for. It's looking for all documents relating to zoo standards, zoo enforcement, and zoo administration over a six-year period. Information about zoo standards and updated zoo standards is available on the SRD website, but some of the information that's been requested here with respect to animal inventory and individuals involved is kept confidential for the well-being of both the animals and the individuals involved.

If the hon. member is seeking information about a specific incident, I would recommend that he or she submit a motion for a return that's tailored to and focused on that specific event.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on this motion.

**Mr. Chase:** Yes. Thank you. The government has criticized us for not being specific, sufficiently focused, and this is a very focused time period: January 1, 2003, to May 8, 2008. I'm wondering how many documents in total would have been produced on animal safety standards and care in that time period to prevent this proposal from being accepted and the information provided. It's a very specific request on a very specific area that has to do with animal well-being of those that are kept in zoos, whether they be in zoos such as the Calgary Zoo or on game farm type arrangements. Unless there's some reason for hiding information, I can't think that you've got trunkloads full of information that couldn't then be provided.

The safety of animals seems to get higher priority than the safety of children in this province. Asking for these reports to be brought forward for a very short period of time should not be an overly horrendous undertaking. So I would urge the minister of sustainable resources to provide what the Premier has said, and that's transparency and accountability on a very specific request: January 1, 2003, to May 8, 2008. Provide the information. What's to hide?

**The Speaker:** Other speakers?

Shall I call on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre to conclude the debate, please?

**An Hon. Member:** Yes, please.

**Ms Blakeman:** Well, thank you for the support from the back there.

Again, I guess I'm not really surprised that I'm hearing the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development singing from the same Public Affairs song sheet that the rest of the ministers did today, so I guess they all follow along with the same script.

It's interesting, Mr. Speaker, because we ask for very specific details in written questions and motions for returns, and we're told

it's too specific and nothing exists. When we widen it and ask for all documents and list the kinds of things we're looking for, then we're told that it's too general and they can't possibly give us everything that's being alluded to. So it just seems that the government is really not very interested in giving us any of the information that we're looking for no matter how we choose to word it although I do note that out of the 10 some-odd questions that were before us today, I think it was agreed to give us three, and they have rejected a series more, six more. So batting average is – what? – 3 to 6.

**Mr. Chase:** One-third.

**Ms Blakeman:** Yeah, one-third. So, yeah, pretty disappointing response from a government that's supposed to be transparent and accountable.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion for a Return 17 lost]

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

#### Bill 206

#### Alberta Personal Income Tax (Physical Activity Credit) Amendment Act, 2008

[Adjourned debate June 2: Mr. Rodney]

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed has utilized the time that he has for this bill, so I'll recognize additional speakers.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you. I very much appreciate the hon. member bringing forward this particular bill, which in general I support. I do want to point out some of the limitations of the bill, and I hope the hon. member can somehow amend or add to the bill to cover these concerns.

Currently in Alberta we have over 64,000 children who are living below the poverty line. Obviously, for them to be living below the poverty line, their parents are in that same circumstance. The tax credits that this Bill 206 would propose will not benefit those children in any way because the parents don't receive sufficient remuneration to be able to have a tax credit. So right off the bat we've eliminated 64,000 children and their parent or parents.

I'm also concerned with Bill 206 in terms of the limitations as to who would qualify and the extent of the physical nature of the exercise required. For example, tai chi. It's not a very expensive undertaking. It doesn't require the purchase of a particular outfit. It's a very gentle movement, but it's very important for flexibility, whether it be for children or for seniors. Because it doesn't produce a sweat or raise the heart and pulmonary actions, would it potentially be considered?

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Then there are a variety of different types of artistic dance: jazz, tap, modern dance, ballet. There are a variety of ethnic dances and so on. I'm just wondering if enrolment in those particular dance programs, while they're not exactly a sport, would be considered. Then there are all types of sort of physical theatre, very active participation. I would wonder if they would be included.

My concern is that in some ways the act is so broad that I'm not sure what the specific definitions are. Then in other cases, for example, the last thing I want to see is somebody who has a very

deep pocket and can afford to go to a very elite gym circumstance receive a reduction on their gym membership paid for by the government. Then they never get their act together for whatever reason to actually go out and improve their own physical well-being, yet they get a monetary reward.

One of the suggestions I would have for the mover of the bill is almost the equivalent of an attendance record, that if we're going to reward people in terms of tax returns, then there should be an expectation that they actually participated in the activity for which we're providing them financial reward.

In my 34 years of teaching and in my own personal life, I've had the opportunity to coach a wide variety of sports, many of which were just, you know, a matter of a pair of runners and a pair of shorts. Of course, runners are getting more and more expensive, but cross-country running required very little equipment, almost along the line of the tai chi. It's something that we could promote and encourage without having a large bill or tax return associated with it.

3:50

Also, I am wondering to what extent – for example, Blizzard soccer, which I coached for years and years and years both indoor and out – parents would get a tax back for enrolling their children in organized sports. Again, soccer is a tremendously active sport, and very little equipment is involved. Hopefully, the cost of registration could be recovered through Bill 206.

Now, in terms of levelling the playing field or levelling the ice or creating the ice, there are a whole number of ways in which the government can directly support sports and recreation. For example, hockey is an extremely expensive sport and figure skating, when you get into the upper levels in terms of the costuming that's required, the extra money for coaches and trainers and so on to take you from sort of an enjoyment participatory level to an elite level. There are tremendous expenses associated with both on-ice sports. The recognition that tax rebates would occur to support and encourage a wider variety of children to be able to participate, whether it be hockey or figure skating or, for that matter, ringette, where there are equipment costs associated, would be of terrific benefit.

Again, going back to the number of children whose parents can't even afford, basically, a pair of skates, even if they go to a second-hand skate circumstance, the government could help tremendously by subsidizing directly cities for recreational complexes. They could lower the costs associated with both children and adults participating in rec centres.

If we want to go beyond the individual who pays sufficient tax in this province to benefit from the recreational pursuits, then there are a whole variety of ways that we can support those activities. Again, within the school program, we are able to offer to a degree, based on the limitations of our school gyms, a variety of activities. For basically six out of the 10 months of the year that the school is in, we can offer programs, but if we want to encourage greater participation, then I would suggest the size of the gymnasium and the degree to which schools are provided with equipment to be able to participate in sports throughout the year – cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, and so on – to give students that opportunity. These are other ways where the government could provide direct subsidies that would reach the entire population of children rather than those individuals who have a sufficient bank account to be able to have this \$1,500 rebate, basically, from their taxes.

What I would like the hon. mover of the bill to consider – and it may take the form of future legislation put forward – is: how can we benefit the greatest number of individuals so that we increase the participation? We used to call it Participaction. The preventative, proactive circumstances that the hon. member, a former teacher,

recognizes, that it's considerably better to be proactive and to promote participation in recreational activities. I would wonder, for example, if in Bill 206 camping fees would be something that could be deducted. I'm wondering if membership in organizations like Beavers, Scouts, Guides, would be considered. For that matter, look at the school fees that individuals have to pay to rent football equipment.

What happens is that it becomes almost an elitist activity, very much like hockey, for those individuals who can afford to rent the equipment. I'm wondering whether Bill 206, again applying it back to the school level, would cover the costs of renting the equipment necessary to participate in sports such as football, where equipment and safety are a large consideration. I'm hoping that the mover of the bill, who is himself a kind of a poster boy for fitness given his pre-Legislature accomplishments, can provide answers.

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

**Mr. Mitzel:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise today to speak to second reading of Bill 206, the Alberta Personal Income Tax (Physical Activity Credit) Amendment Act, 2008. Healthy living has been a lifestyle of Albertans for the past 100 years. It's been physical activity that's helped build our province.

Mr. Speaker, as our population grew, it became apparent that a large segment of our population in the course of their jobs and careers and their lives are not as physically active as they once were or should be. It's also apparent in the health statistics now coming forward that a great percentage of our population is becoming heavier, becoming more inactive, and as a result becoming more unhealthy.

There's been a great deal of focus by Alberta Health and Wellness, health groups, Alberta Education, and many others on trying to change the trend that is happening. Perhaps one of the best programs I can remember was the Participaction campaign. Mr. Speaker, the information technology world we live in, especially for our younger people, does not encourage exercise. I do agree that something must be done to encourage Albertans to exercise and live healthier lives.

Sports are a big thing for most Albertans, but most of the people who participate do so from the sidelines, from the bleachers. What are they doing while they're watching? Eating and drinking fast foods. The pace of life we have sometimes necessitates the type of food we eat, fast foods.

I've thought hard and long, Mr. Speaker, about the tax credit proposal that the bill suggests. It proposes a tax credit for the costs or a portion of the costs associated with organized physical activity. There are two themes of questions that have to be asked, though. Number one, what are the legitimate costs of any approved activity? Is it the cost of membership? Is it the cost of a licence for hunting or fishing? Is it the cost of a pair of running shoes or a track suit?

Number two, what will be classified as an organized physical activity? Does it have to be a licensed organization? Can it just be two or three individuals who have organized themselves to do a particular activity? Does it have to be at an approved health gym or club? Who will be tasked with determining the eligibility of not only the activity but also the venue?

When you talk about the tax credits for people who participate in organized activities, the question arises: what about those people who may wish to use a home gym or exercise in front of the TV or run alone? Not everyone enjoys participating in organized activities. Another segment of our population is the one that includes those that are physically active in ways the bill seems to fail to recognize. A

good portion of our population engages in physical activity as a daily part of their job, such as construction workers, farmers and ranchers, et cetera. These people also are, perhaps, mainly from the rural populations of Alberta and don't have access to an organized gym.

Mr. Speaker, it would appear to me that the health clubs, the gyms, and the sporting organizations will be the winners in all of this. If this bill passes as it is, there will be an increase in the memberships of these organized physical activity centres, and to be sure, there will be an increase in participation by Albertans, but just because someone signs up for a physical activity or spends money towards an eligible activity – they may never go to that gym or organized activity. They may also just do it for the tax credit.

4:00

Mr. Speaker, how many people do you know who have treadmills and who use them? Many make good plant stands and clothes hangers. The treadmill companies are the winners. Further clarification is needed to determine who qualifies for a tax credit and what is an eligible activity.

Though I do applaud the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed for bringing this bill and the idea forward, I strongly believe people should be encouraged to take control of their own health and their own lives. Encouragement such as the Participaction campaign that I previously mentioned and the new campaign Catch Health will go a long way to help remind people to take control of their health. Governments should not need to pay people to be active or healthy.

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

**Mr. Griffiths:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure today to rise to speak to Bill 206, the Alberta Personal Income Tax (Physical Activity Credit) Amendment Act, 2008. I'd first like to begin by applauding the member for his action. Every single one of us knows how important exercise is and that it can reduce heart disease, diabetes, anxiety, depression, cancer, obesity. There are so many things that exercise can do to cure many of the maladies that all of us have.

We also know, Mr. Speaker, that if we all get healthier, we'll use less drugs and need to have less doctor's visits and spend less time in the hospital. If we were all more active, then instead of seeing a doctor for a stress headache, we could just work out or jog for half an hour to eliminate that headache. Instead of going to see a doctor for diabetes, exercise can help reduce the incidence of diabetes. Or for a strained back: most any doctor will tell you that exercise is one of the best cures for a stressed back.

Instead of taking drugs for the first incidence of a sickness or a malady that you have, Mr. Speaker, if we all exercised regularly to begin with so that we never got that malady, it could save the health care system an incredible amount of money. In this day and age when we all talk about natural and homeopathic medicines, no herb, nothing that we have in homeopathic medicine, is a better cure than the most natural thing you can do, and that's exercise. Everyone knows that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, and exercise is the best ounce you can possibly spend in looking for a cure for anything, for a physical or a mental condition.

Mr. Speaker, inciting people to get healthy, to exercise is critical. But it's not just about exercise; it's about eating right. It's about taking the proper holidays, about taking the proper rest, about taking time for yourself, about exercising your mind and your body together. It's not just about running on a treadmill for half an hour or lifting a few weights. It's about an entire healthy lifestyle that can help reduce costs to health care.

Now, as the hon. member has presented Bill 206, I do commend him because the encouragement of physical activity is important. Although, Mr. Speaker, I do have to point out, with an honourable intent, that I don't agree with the philosophy of this bill. You see, I understand that on occasion governments do try to incent behaviour. They try to encourage the populace to do certain things because, after all, we use taxpayers' dollars to treat a lot of different conditions that society has, so we try to reduce some of those costs by incenting behaviour within society. I believe, quite frankly, that this bill will not accomplish this. It won't achieve the goals that we have.

I'll explain this to you. We have to start this entire process by asking ourselves: what do we want? Mr. Speaker, we want people to be healthy. We want them to exercise more. We want them to lower their cholesterol. We want them to take appropriate holidays and breaks. We want them, in essence, to become healthier. Period.

The second question we have to ask is: will this accomplish it? I say, no, not necessarily. Buying a gym membership when someone won't use it will not make people healthier. In fact, I think it has been mentioned by my colleague across the way that many gyms will tell you that when they actually budget, do their books, their business plan, they know that only about a third of the people who buy a gym membership will actually go and work out. Otherwise the gym would be too full to accommodate all the memberships they have.

As well, if people play hockey but then go and eat nachos for two hours and drink beer with all their buddies and undo all the exercise that they just got from playing hockey, is that really what we're trying to incent when we give them a tax credit for actually paying to join a hockey team? I don't believe that's what we want.

We have to ask ourselves: will this accomplish it? We also have to ask ourselves: who will this miss when we go through this legislation? Families that can't afford organized sports or can't afford a gym membership: this will miss them. Perhaps, instead, Mr. Speaker, the entire family goes for a walk for an hour every evening, or perhaps they just go to the park and they all toss around a football or a baseball or they play Frisbee or something. This will miss them because they can't afford to buy a gym membership or to pay for organized sports.

Who else will it miss, Mr. Speaker? Rural Albertans. Rural Albertans don't often have access to organized sports or to gym memberships. I know many people who live on the farm who walk eight or 10 miles a day. They go around and check their crops that way or go check on the cattle. There are many people who live on the farm or have jobs where they get incredible amounts of exercise every single day, but they don't belong to a gym, so this will miss them.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we have to ask: what will this particular bill do? Well, in short, it rewards those who spend money. Whether you're buying a gym membership or you're joining a hockey team or whatever you're doing, the reward is not the healthy activity; the reward is spending the money to buy the membership or to do the activity. Quite frankly, as was mentioned by my colleague across the way, there is no assurance, no guarantee that by spending that money you will adopt a healthy lifestyle, that you will actually go and work out at the gym, that you will actually go play hockey or that even if you go play hockey, you won't sit around eating nachos and hot wings and drinking beer for four hours after. There's no incentive to adopt a healthy, quality lifestyle. I enjoy beer and hot wings as much as the next guy. The point is that this is not incenting people for a healthy lifestyle; it's incenting them to spend money.

The final question we have to ask ourselves, Mr. Speaker, is why are we incenting people to spend money? We should not be

incenting that activity. Now, by activity I don't mean working out in a gym or playing hockey; the activity I'm talking about is incenting people to buy the membership or to spend the money. That's not what the purpose of government is. We don't need to incent people to spend money; what we need to incent people to do is achieve the results that we want. If we want a healthier populace, we need to find a way to incent them to become healthier, not incent them to buy the gym membership.

Mr. Speaker, I have to say that I personally wish we had not eliminated health care premiums because it was the best tool we had for incenting people's behaviour. Bear with me for a moment. We have vehicle insurance now. When people buy insurance for their vehicles, we have a grid system so that everybody starts at an average. Everyone pays the exact same amount. The more accidents you have, the higher up the grid, the more you pay for that insurance. The fewer accidents you have, the fewer speeding tickets, the better driver you are, the lower you go down on the grid, which is a natural enhancement to make you want to drive safer. If you insist on speeding and having accidents and moving up the grid, I guess you're going to pay for it. It's sort of a carrot and a stick. It turns around and tells every single person: you have personal responsibility. If you make the right choices when you're driving, then you will be rewarded with lower premiums, but if you make improper choices, incorrect choices, then you will pay more. It's your choice whether or not you're going to speed, whether you're going to get into an accident. It's your choice where your premiums are going to be.

Mr. Speaker, with the health care premiums we had a perfect opportunity to do the same thing. We had the opportunity for everyone to be set at a base health care premium that operated like insurance. If you lowered your cholesterol, if you lowered your weight, if you got physical exercise and made yourself healthier — there are measurements you can do with a body mass index or a hip-to-waist ratio test or a cholesterol test or a smoking test that tells if you've had a cigarette within a year: all things to measure whether or not you're a healthy individual. Any doctor can do those tests. How you get to that point would be entirely up to you. It would be entirely up to every single Albertan to make the decision on what they were going to do. Perhaps they want to walk eight miles a day to go check the cattle. Perhaps they want to buy a gym membership and go and work out. Perhaps they just want to take the kids to the park and play Frisbee every day. It's up to them to decide what they want to do, but if they make inappropriate decisions and their cholesterol goes up and their body mass index ratio goes up and they continue to smoke, then they will pay those consequences of higher health care premiums.

Mr. Speaker, my point is that we can offer all sorts of tax incentives. Some people will use them for a tax advantage. Some people won't be able to utilize those advantages that we've created if they live in rural Alberta or they can't afford the memberships. But if we actually had a system with the health care premiums that operated like real insurance, every single Albertan, every single family would be able to make their own choices of how they're going to achieve the results. Quite frankly, as a government we don't care how they achieve those results as long as they achieve those results.

For that reason, Mr. Speaker, although I admire the intent of the bill to make Albertans more active and healthier, I won't be supporting this, and I encourage all of my colleagues in this House to not support it.

4:10

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



**Mr. Xiao:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to speak about Bill 206, the Alberta Personal Income Tax (Physical Activity Credit) Amendment Act, 2008. Bill 206 is a tax credit which would help motivate Albertans to make healthier lifestyle choices. I call it a common-sense bill. It is one that makes sense politically, socially, and financially. I believe that the best health care should be done through prevention, and the best prevention is to pursue a healthy lifestyle.

Mr. Speaker, I am confident that such an amendment would benefit all Albertans a great deal. It helps to promote the government's vision for a healthier Alberta, and it reflects the Alberta government's commitment to healthy living by providing a tangible incentive for Albertans to make healthier lifestyle choices, all of which leads to a healthier populace. A healthier Alberta helps to decrease the number of those who require health care services over the long term. This clearly aligns with the government's priority to increase access to quality health care and improves the efficiency and effectiveness of the province's health care service delivery system.

This bill supports several of the specific frameworks and strategies undertaken by the government of Alberta to achieve its priorities. This government's 2002 Framework for a Healthy Alberta, for example, whose aim is to have a generation of Albertans with a reduced risk of developing heart disease, cancer, lung disease, and injuries by 2012, as well as Alberta's active living strategy are part of a broadened plan that includes both the federal and provincial or territorial levels of government and is designed to increase physical activity for all Canadians.

Furthermore, there's a precedent for the feasibility of these kinds of tax incentives, Mr. Speaker. The federal children's fitness tax credit provides a nonrefundable tax credit for fees paid by parents who register a child under the age of 16 in an eligible form of physical activity during the year up to a \$500 maximum. Presently Manitoba and Nova Scotia have programs in place which parallel the children's fitness tax credit.

However, Bill 206 would be the first of its kind in Canada as it is geared to all Albertans. In this way it is not only more comprehensive but also innovative, and it reinforces our place as a leader across Canada and around the world. Mr. Speaker, socially Bill 206 would help to raise awareness on the part of Albertans about the many positive impacts of physical activity on personal health and the need to make a personal investment in one's own well-being. More and more studies are revealing the way in which incentives can successfully work in concert to improve levels of participation.

According to a report by the Canada West Foundation wellness incentives are key to behavioural lifestyle changes. Indeed, studies have shown that more focus on strategies is required to successfully motivate and encourage people to participate in physical activities. It is motivation that lies at the heart of much of this. While public awareness of the availability of a physical activity credit and the positive effects of adopting and maintaining a healthy lifestyle are keys to encouraging Albertans to be proactive towards their personal health, I believe that Bill 206 effectively encapsulates this strategy and looks to the future, supporting a strategy that it can envision the benefits to be gained in the long term.

Indeed, Mr. Speaker, some of these long-term benefits are economic since increased physical activity has been shown to help reduce one's risk of developing a host of psychological and coronary diseases, and it may lessen the amount of resources that we must draw upon down the road. Finances and resources spent on medication and health care due to poor lifestyle choices will now be freed up to be redirected to areas of research and patient care where there was no method of prevention.

Most importantly, Mr. Speaker, as a former Edmonton YMCA board member I can speak to the benefits that I believe Bill 206 would bring to Albertans. During my time as a board member of the Edmonton YMCA I witnessed first-hand the overwhelmingly positive public response to complimentary passes that we handed out as a matter of course. These passes allow people to try the YMCA facilities and experience for themselves all that a fitness centre of that magnitude has to offer. They were able to see first-hand the variety of activities and programs that were available to them. Many people were hard-pressed not to discover something that piqued their interest.

Simply allowing people to be in the environment went a long way to opening their eyes to the physical, mental, and social benefits that being active can bring. Many of them wished to return again and again, and they were very interested in memberships. However, despite all of this many of those who took advantage of the opportunity these passes provided were unable to join simply due to the cost of membership fees. As such, I believe a physical activity tax credit would fill the gap for those who wish to participate but cannot. In particular, it would provide low-income individuals and families with the opportunity to participate in sports and fitness activities they otherwise would not be able to afford.

In the end, Mr. Speaker, I believe that Bill 206 is the logical step for health and wellness in the province, and I will be lending my support. Thank you.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, followed by the hon. Member for Peace River.

**Mr. Horne:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise in the House this afternoon and speak during second reading of Bill 206. Before launching into some arguments in favour of the bill, which is what I'd like to do this afternoon, I'd first of all like to thank and congratulate my colleague the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed for bringing the bill forward.

I think that as we've seen from the arguments that have been presented this afternoon and previously in the session, there is a lot of interest but also a lot of disagreement about the merits of the bill and its ability to have an impact on the health system. So what I'd like to propose to the House this afternoon, Mr. Speaker, is that there are really two areas that we need to consider. The first is the potential for the incentives created by the bill to have a significant impact on the epidemic, if I could use the term, of chronic disease in Canada. The second has to do with what some other members have alluded to insofar as the bill's opportunity to present a financial incentive which would encourage people to lead healthier lifestyles.

**4:20**

On the first point, Mr. Speaker, members may be interested sometime to look at a couple of websites. The first is the website of the Canadian Nurses Association. It gives a very good snapshot of the impact of chronic disease on this country at this point in time. A few points of note. Each year approximately 163,000 Canadians die due to cardiovascular disease, cancer, lung disease, and diabetes, accounting for over two-thirds of the total annual death toll in this country. Cardiovascular disease is the greatest single cause of death, disability, and illness and was responsible for 34 per cent of lives lost in 2001. Another interesting fact: over 2 million Canadians are estimated to have diabetes, with 60,000 new cases diagnosed each year. These numbers are expected to rise as the population ages and as obesity rates rise. Finally, about 100,000 Canadians are diagnosed with arthritis each year. It's estimated that by 2026 more than 6 million Canadians will have been diagnosed with arthritis.

Why should these statistics be of concern to us, Mr. Speaker? First of all, as a number of members have alluded to, chronic disease comes at great cost in Canada. It continues to be the major demand on the Canadian health care system and a major burden on the economy. The total cost of illness, disability, and death due to chronic disease in Canada is now over \$80 billion annually. That's according to Health Canada. That was their statistic in 2002.

The other reason that I think we need to be concerned, Mr. Speaker, is the impact on productivity. Of course, as home to the fastest growing economy in Canada, Alberta needs to be concerned about the productivity of not only today's workforce but that of the next generation. In case members need any more convincing about the impact of chronic disease, I'd also invite you to take a look at the Public Health Agency of Canada's website where they've established what they call a chronic disease clock. Take, for example, the date of October 15, 2008, last week. Deaths so far this year attributed to chronic disease in Canada were 129,877. On that day 177 were attributed to cardiovascular disease, 68 to cancer; chronic respiratory disease accounted for 13 of those deaths, and the list goes on. We need to be concerned, I would submit.

When we look at this bill, not just for its impact on the current generation, which I'd be the first to admit may not be significant, what we're really talking about here, I think, is our ability to influence the health status of the next generation of Albertans and Canadians. For that to occur, we need to establish some incentives. This problem – and I think a lot of other members have pointed this out in debate – is particularly difficult in the context of a universal health care system. Health care in Canada comes at a significant cost. As we know, in Alberta our health care costs stand at about 40 per cent of operating expenditures; in Ontario and Quebec those costs are approaching 50 per cent. Health care does come with a significant cost, but the thing that follows from that is that health care can become an opportunity cost for other very significant public policy priorities, things like education, infrastructure, postsecondary education, seniors' programs, and the list goes on.

We do need to be concerned, Mr. Speaker, about how we can position the next generation to deliver better on performance indicators that have to do with our health status. Incidence of chronic disease would be one, health care outcomes would be another, and health system utilization and performance would be a third. To accomplish that, the challenge is to reduce demand and with demand reduce utilization in the system.

I think all members would agree with me that there's a limit to what can be achieved in the present context in terms of reducing demand. The number of individuals developing prediabetes is increasing at a significant rate. We may be able to undertake interventions that will lessen the impact of chronic disease. If you use diabetes, for example, complications such as vision loss, kidney failure, and others can be mitigated when the condition is identified early enough, but we really don't have anything yet to position the next generation to take better care of their health and achieve a better health status.

I think we owe it to ourselves and, most importantly, to the next generation to consider initiatives such as those outlined in Bill 206. I can tell the House that from my own professional experience in the field of health policy, there is certainly no one initiative, no one strategy that I can think of anywhere in the OECD countries, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, that has been identified that would have this sort of impact. Mr. Speaker, there's no magic bullet, so to speak. So I encourage members to consider Bill 206 in this context.

I guess the other point I just alluded to was: what do we do in a universal health system? That's a more interesting question in

Alberta now that health care premiums will be eliminated as of January 1, 2009. We really don't have an opportunity to offer Albertans any financial incentive to take better care of their own health. While I'd be the first to agree that we don't have mechanisms in place to verify that people have undertaken additional physical activity, I do think that we can look to the foundation of medicare, which, in fact, was established as an insurance program, Mr. Speaker, as an example. The opportunity to reduce one's cost through a tax credit or other means in return for mitigating one's own risk of developing chronic disease or one's family or one's community is, I think, something that we need to take a second look at.

I'd encourage all members to consider strongly the bill that has been put before us. I think that there have been a number of excellent suggestions for amendments to the bill that could be considered, but I would challenge all members to think of any other initiatives within a universally funded public health care system that would offer people the opportunity to look at financial incentives. This thing that we value so dearly in Canada, Mr. Speaker, the universal health care system, medicare, does operate at a disadvantage in that respect. There really is, as I said, no other opportunity that I'm aware of for people to look at financial incentives to change behaviour and, more importantly, to perhaps encourage others in their family and in their own community to do the same.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak on the bill. I hope, as I said, that members will consider some of the amendments that have been offered. I look to this as an opportunity for us to take a first step at some real tangible incentives to change health behaviour, with the objective of achieving a healthier population 20 and 25 years from now.

Thank you.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Member for Peace River, followed by the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

**Mr. Oberle:** Thank you. It's my honour to rise today to join the debate on Bill 206, the Alberta Personal Income Tax (Physical Activity Credit) Amendment Act, 2008. That's a mouthful, Mr. Speaker. The bill, if passed, would attempt to increase participation in physical activities among Alberta's youth and adults by means of a nonrefundable tax credit of up to \$1,500 per person each year for money spent participating in organized physical activities.

Mr. Speaker, I applaud the member for the initiative and for his genuine desire to improve the physical fitness and overall health and wellness of our Alberta population, but I must say that I can't support the bill in its present form for a number of reasons.

First of all, I believe that this bill is noninclusive. The Member for Calgary-Varsity spoke a bit about the effect, that it would have no effect on Albertans of low income. Low-income Albertans are unlikely to be able to afford the physical activity programs that would qualify for this tax credit. The upfront costs of the programs would just be too much, and they wouldn't be able to claim the tax credit.

I'll just point out a couple of realities of finances in the low-income tax bracket. In 2004, Mr. Speaker, 3 and a half million Canadians were considered low income. Most of them spent the majority of their money on necessities such as food, shelter, and clothing. The one-fifth of Canadian households which fell into the lowest tax bracket spent about \$23,800 in 2006. Of this almost half went to cover the three basic necessities of food, shelter, and clothing. Three per cent of their gross income was claimed by personal income tax.

4:30

In comparison, the top one-fifth of Canadian households spent approximately \$138,000 in 2006. Only 28 per cent of their income was spent on basic necessities, and 29 per cent of their incomes was consumed by personal income tax. Clearly, Mr. Speaker, the benefits of this would accrue to wealthier families and not to low-income families. I suspect that even without the income tax credit the wealthier families would consume these services at a higher rate. Statistics Canada data between '92 and 2005 reveal that 68 per cent of children in highest income households participated in organized sports compared to 44 per cent of children in lower income households. We're not going to coax these children out of the house by offering them tax credits.

Mr. Speaker, there are programs that help lower income families, and maybe we should talk about those. Maybe we could find ways to support those. There's Hockey Stars for Hope, for example, operating in six countries, assisting 50 million children in participating in sports that they love.

Mr. Speaker, another area where this bill falls short is, I guess, in the definition of what physical activity is. The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright pointed out the activity levels of rural populations. For example, the daily routines of hauling feed, riding horses, or whatever farm activities they do put them probably amongst the most fit of our youth but often unable to access organized programs. Is there some reason why we would exclude or fail to reward those types of activities?

What about involvement in 4-H, which involves more than 7,000 young rural Albertans? Though not qualified, certainly anybody that's been exposed to that program would understand the physical benefits of such a group affiliation, not just in physical activity but also in healthy lifestyles and healthy eating. Mr. Speaker, 4-H membership comes with costs, not just the membership fees but the activity fees for livestock, whatever program they're in. Again, not recognized.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat talked about Participation, for example. Alberta is unveiling a program called Catch Health, another sort of broad-based, inclusive program trying to educate people about the benefits of healthy lifestyles.

Mr. Speaker, I think the ultimate problem that I see with this bill is that it's not realistic to expect that we're going to take a five-year-old child who is already accustomed to a sedentary lifestyle, sits on the couch, eats an unhealthy snack, and watches TV after school every day and that by means of giving this child a tax credit, we're going to coax him into a hockey program and therefore make him into a healthy individual for the rest of his life. I think we fall short on that.

Worse, Mr. Speaker, try that with an adult who is used to a sedentary lifestyle. We're going to turn his life around through encouraging him to join organized hockey? I don't think that's going to happen. I think it's a complex problem. It requires more than simple solutions. While, again, I applaud the effort, I think we need to put our thinking caps on.

Just before I close, I want to make some comments relative to what the Member for Battle River-Wainwright had to say about health care premiums and the role that they might play in this argument. Mr. Speaker, I guess I agree at the highest altitude that an insurance program in health could be used to incent behaviour, as car insurance does. But I would point out that, at least in my belief, our insurance premiums are a tax masquerading as an insurance premium. I don't believe that they were used that way, were intended to be used that way, or, in fact, could be used that way.

I'll point out that if they were really used as insurance premiums, some of the people that would pay the highest insurance premiums

might be those extremely physically fit people that undertake dangerous lifestyles – I don't know – mountain climbers, for example. We'd certainly have to find a way to charge higher premiums for people that don't eat broccoli. I just don't believe that premiums could be used in an insurance program. I'll repeat: it's a tax masquerading as an insurance program, which our government eliminated and I was very proud to support.

Not only that, if I might add one more thing, the insurance differential would have to be allocated on the basis of genetics as well. There's a significant amount of data that suggests that you're likely to inherit the lifestyle and the body style of your parents, as I have, Mr. Speaker. I guess I would have to pay higher health care premiums through no fault or no choice of my own.

Mr. Speaker, again I applaud the member for a look at what we can do to improve the health and wellness of Albertans. I will support any effort that moves in that direction, but it's got to have a realistic approach. There has to be some demonstration of cause and effect. We want to pick something that's successful.

With that, I'll close my remarks. Thank you very much.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

**Mr. Anderson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and speak to Bill 206, the Personal Income Tax (Physical Activity Credit) Amendment Act, 2008, proposed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed. While it is obvious, I feel, that the object of this bill is to increase participation in physical activity and healthy living among all Albertans, this legislation has many positive implications, and that's what I'd like to speak to today. I commend the Member for Calgary-Lougheed for bringing forward Bill 206 as this is a tax break that would be particularly beneficial to families. During the provincial election myself and many of my colleagues that I am aware of emphasized the need for tax relief for families. I firmly believe that strong families are the foundation of our past, present, and future prosperity in this province.

So much talk about crime and all the things going on on our city streets right now. The most successful, effective antidotes for crime, poverty, and all these other social issues that we're talking about are caring parents working together to build healthy, safe, and financially stable homes. These kinds of homes enable children to learn from their parents and grow up to become contributing members of our society, securing Alberta's future for years to come.

Participating in sporting activities as a family helps strengthen the family unit. As accomplishments are shared, self-esteem in children is increased, and family members work together toward set goals. Physical activity increases the mental, emotional, and psychological well-being of participants, but it also provides parents with an opportunity to teach, support, encourage, and spend time with their children. As I've said, Mr. Speaker, this province should make every effort to support parents by lessening the heavy financial burdens inherent in raising children. I believe that Bill 206 will make it more financially attractive to raise children and spend time as a family.

While the federal government already offers the federal children's fitness tax credit to assist with the costs of children's physical activity, Bill 206 would create a similar provincial program to provide additional assistance in this area. The federal children's fitness tax credit, for those who do not know, provides for a nonrefundable tax credit on eligible amounts of up to \$500 paid by parents to register a child under the age of 16 in an eligible form of physical activity during the year such as soccer, hockey, those types of activities and others.

The Fitness Industry Council of Canada is currently lobbying the federal government to expand the CFTC, as it is known, to include an adult fitness tax credit for eligible adult physical activity and sport. Other provinces in Canada such as Manitoba and Nova Scotia have taken their commitment to healthy families a step further and have implemented programs in addition to the federal tax credit. Starting in 2009, for example, Nova Scotia's healthy living tax credit for sport and recreational activity fees will be extended to all residents of the province. It'll provide all citizens with up to \$500 per person in tax credits per year. The expanded tax credit is anticipated to save Nova Scotia taxpayers more than \$8 million a year.

Bill 206 is similar in spirit to Nova Scotia's healthy living tax credit. It allows the entire family to reduce the cost of engaging in an active lifestyle. Bill 206 will provide a tax credit of up to \$1,500 per person each year for expenses incurred by participating in organized physical activities. This means that a family of four, for example, who spends \$1,500 per family member for approved activities could claim a total of \$6,000 in tax deductions per year. This translates into a net tax savings of \$600. Or if a family claimed a thousand dollars' worth of activities, they would save \$100 in taxes.

4:40

In summary, there are three primary reasons I support Bill 206. Firstly, I believe that this tax credit will likely change the actions of some parents who were formerly deterred from enrolling their families in activities because of the rising costs of these activities. This will allow parents who previously couldn't afford to sign up for expensive physical activities the opportunity to do so. Financial incentives, even relatively small ones, have been proven to work at least to some degree. I would suggest that if they didn't, corporations like McDonald's and Wal-Mart would have stopped using them a long time ago.

Second, Bill 206 sends a message to Albertans of what is considered positive behaviour. If we tax cigarettes and place repulsive warnings on their packaging to discourage a bad health choice, it seems just as appropriate to put a financial incentive on a positive health choice.

Finally, it's a tax break and, most importantly, a tax break particularly beneficial to those who need it most in this economy, as strong and prosperous as it is; that is, families. While campaigning, I ran on a promise that I would advocate tax relief for families, and I intend to support any initiative that will make it more financially attractive to raise a family in Alberta. This bill does just that, Mr. Speaker.

There are several concerns about this bill. I won't get into all of them, but one of them is that rural Alberta would somehow benefit less from this tax credit. I have to disagree with that. Rural Albertans and the children in rural Alberta families are huge users of physical activity and physical sports. When I look back – I grew up in rural Alberta – that's all I did: played hockey, played soccer, played football. All my friends did as well because a lot of what there was to do was that. There weren't other activities to otherwise engage in. So I think this will help rural Alberta families as well.

At best, the personal income tax amendment act will positively affect the health choices people make for themselves and their children. At the very least, families who are already active will be given a break on their fees and could divert the additional money to investments and other expenses they feel are important to their families' welfare.

I urge the members of this House to consider this bill's merits and join me in supporting Bill 206. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Dr. Sherman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to speak to Bill 206, the Alberta Personal Income Tax (Physical Activity Credit) Amendment Act, 2008. I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed for bringing up this bill. This bill is more than really a tax credit; it's a conversation about health care in general.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, across the country the lineups in family doctors' offices and emergency departments are lengthy. The times to see your physician are lengthy. We simply will not have enough health care workers nationally in the health care workforce if people don't look after themselves. What we need to do is to have a good prevention program which aims to reduce the number of patients out there to begin with. Really, we need to encourage Canadians and Albertans to eat right and move more. That's what this bill is about. It's about moving more.

Now, physical activity has become a forgotten pastime, especially for our children due to the screens of computers, video games, televisions. In the olden days we used to play street hockey and baseball. The children of today many times sit in their living room and play street hockey and ball hockey on the video machine. A report released earlier this year says that 90 per cent of Canadian children are not getting enough exercise. They actually put pedometers on Canadian and European children, and our children take upwards of just 11,000 steps a day. Children in Europe are up to 15,000 to 16,000 steps per day. As a result, our obesity rates have been increasing; 20 per cent of Albertan children are overweight or obese. That leads to 30 to 45 per cent of adults being overweight and obese.

The burden of chronic disease such as diabetes, hypertension, strokes, heart attacks is ever-increasing. We need to get Albertans living healthier lifestyles. At the end of the day it's not how long you live; it's how well you live. Now, if we don't live healthy lifestyles, the last few years of our lives are spent on medications and visiting doctors' offices and spent in hospitals. I think that if we can get Albertans living healthy and living well before that last day, that needs to be the goal as policy-makers.

Now, these statistics are alarming, and they have a major impact on the health care system down the road. We have five workers for every senior, and 25 years from now, when we're old and grey and in our wheelchairs, we'll have three workers for every senior. If we keep on at the rate of illness that we currently have, the grandparents will be looking after those three people who are supposed to be working.

Now, we know that physical activity has many benefits. It can improve both physical and mental health, reduce the risk of illness or at least delay its onset, help to maintain a healthy body weight, reduce the impact of aging, improve life expectancy, and especially provide a better quality of life.

On a societal level not only the burden of illness but health care costs have been climbing across the country. I was recently in Halifax. Fifty per cent of their budget is spent on health care, and in Nova Scotia they have a deficit, they have debt, and they just recently received a good transfer payment. With the state of the economy I fear that we need to turn this ship around, and prevention is the key. Simple preventative measures like becoming more active can do much to reduce all this and its associated costs.

Now, the trend towards inactivity has evolved over time. It took a long time for us to get here, and it's going to take a little while to change this behaviour. It's going to require a multifaceted, long-term effort on everyone's part. In this regard I believe that incen-

tives should be part of a broad, multifaceted approach to encouraging healthy lifestyles and preventing chronic disease. In a way, it's like giving a carrot: it may not benefit everybody, but for some people their vision will get better.

Providing a nonrefundable tax credit for organization or program fees, as this bill proposes, may encourage some individuals to commit to a physical activity program and reward those who incur costs to maintain good health, and that's extremely positive. However, there are a number of considerations with this approach. As other colleagues of mine have mentioned, unstructured activities with little cost, simply like walking or jogging in your neighbourhood or cycling, for example, can be equally effective. There are many occupations where there are a lot of hardworking Albertans who work many hours a week, occupations that require physical labour, like construction or farming even. Because of the flexibility offered by these activities, busy individuals and families may be very active but may not take part in organized programs that require cost. The affordability and availability of organized programs is another issue to consider based on where you live. In some parts of the province you may not have access to participate in this program.

Bill 206 is just one strategy to help improve the health and wellness of Albertans. There are other programs and strategies that already exist and could be created that would have similar effects. Recently on behalf of the Minister of Health and Wellness we have a few programs that we've announced.

One is the Create a Movement campaign. It's something called Catch Health. It's a tongue-in-cheek approach to convincing our young children in schools to catch health, warning them about the side effects of catching health. They might actually improve their marks in school, be happier. Bullying will be down in schools, and they might enjoy themselves and enjoy their lives, and their parents may catch health.

We recently announced new nutrition guidelines. Not only is physical activity important; it's also important coupled with healthy eating habits. We have lots of people who are very active, but then, as some of my colleagues mentioned, they drink beer and eat a lot of chips afterwards. That sometimes negates the positive effects of activity. I think that physical activity coupled with good nutrition is the key.

Now, the Ministry of Health and Wellness has worked to support Albertans in achieving healthy lifestyles by creating awareness and strengthening motivation through information and resources. Not only is participation in these programs very valuable but also education, education so that people can make wise choices. Many other departments in this government also support and encourage Albertans to lead healthy lifestyles by providing grant funding to construct community recreation centres and create education programs and family support programs.

4:50

Ultimately, Mr. Speaker, active living and healthy lifestyles are lifestyle choices. It's a decision to incorporate physical activity into each and every day regardless of whether we have a tax benefit or not. On behalf of the Ministry of Health and Wellness I encourage every Albertan to take some time out with their family, to walk around the block, turn the televisions off, turn the computers off, get off the BlackBerry's.

To begin with, I encourage my friends in the Legislature to show leadership on this issue. There are some of our friends whose waistlines are a bit challenging. I encourage everyone here to take leadership and improve their health outcomes.

Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. It's been an honour for me to stand up and speak to this issue. Again, I thank all of my colleagues for discussing and debating the importance of physical health and

fitness and activity. I thank my colleague from Calgary-Lougheed for bringing this bill forward.

Thank you.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Any other members wish to speak on this bill?

**Mr. Snelgrove:** Mr. Speaker, there are times when you can have a discussion about a means to a goal where everyone has certain ground that they're right on, and this bill is probably one. There's no question that the health of our children and the health of many of us is certainly taking the wrong trend, and we are putting our society and our health care system in grave jeopardy by not understanding what we're faced with and then trying to determine how we're going to deal with the issue. There's absolutely no doubt that the lifestyle choices of many of our children and their diets are going to put diabetes treatment far off any scale we would have ever determined. It's probably been mentioned that they're in danger of becoming the first generation in history to live shorter lives than us. As far as my 19-year-old goes, there may be other circumstances around that.

Either way, I have to base my argument on this bill on the statement that says that government should do for no man what he can do for himself. I believe we have to develop the lifestyles and the habits and the commitment to health far before you become a tax saving either for yourself or for your kids. I would have to question parents who won't, when it's free, counsel and work with their kids to keep them healthy but who might pay someone to do it. Of course, that seems to be a lot of what goes on nowadays. We're far happier to hire a babysitter than take our own kids for a walk.

I'm a little concerned that we're falling for the idea that if we make it financially somewhat beneficial for you at the top end, then that will do it. But in most circumstances, Mr. Speaker, where there are corporations of middle and moderate size to large size or even to the small business owner who is able to now in many ways shield the cost of sports and fitness through their business costs, that happens, and it's an allowable expense. You can do that. We encourage our government staff to attend things and be participants.

Like the hon. member from Rutherford said, I would far rather have the cost right on the health care itself so that if you don't want to take care of yourself, you pay. The only clear connection that all the studies and the coalition right clear through have discovered that makes people responsible for their health is when there is a financial cost if they don't. Nothing else has been shown to work. It doesn't say: give them tax breaks. It says: make them hit their wallet when they want to.

Now, that's a two-edged sword. Like our hon. whip said, then do you penalize people who take on extreme sports or play recreational hockey or ski? I can't imagine in the course of a year how many broken legs come out of Banff and Lake Louise, but we sure don't want to stop people from what's a very active sport. It's that balance there. There's a risk and a reward. You want to do it? Good. You assume the risks of it. Great. You pay the consequences. I would love to see the health care premiums of some of the people that are in the rodeo business. I can't imagine how they have ever managed to keep coverage of any kind.

I would say this. If we're going to be serious about this, we're going to have to go directly to the target area of people, and many of them are low income. A lot of it is in our aboriginal communities and the settlements. If you're going to be serious about this, you go back to the schools. You reinforce the physical education component of it, and if it means doubling that as opposed to what I've seen happen, removing it, you simply have to do it. You have to make the parents aware that it's their kids they're killing with kindness.

Yet we probably support more kids with video games. It's a choice. All the money in the world won't save the \$1,500 that I think the average video game now probably is or whatever an Xbox has been. Parents are far happier to buy that to look after their kids.

Take it back a step. Why do the parents need someone to look after the kids? Because they're both working. They have to work. Our tax system has been so unfair for years that it was unfair.

**Mr. Ouellette:** The federal, not our tax system.

**Mr. Snelgrove:** The federal tax system.

Why don't you revisit that so that you can allow parents the choice to spend time with their kids to teach them healthy lifestyles and to do things with them? It's going to take a lot more than a \$1,500 tax credit to do it. I can admit that there are certainly sound arguments on both sides and the need for changes to lifestyles and even some of the comments about people who sit around and do very little and have an expanding waistline and eat unhealthy foods. While I resemble that remark, Mr. Speaker, it's very true.

I would say to people that this is not an appropriate bill to address the system. It should be given careful consideration, but the broader perspective, our health, is far more than just a bill that would very clearly only affect lots of those who it will have no real effect on, and it misses the greatest portion of our society, that actually needs our attention.

With that, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Ouellette:** Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to get up and say a few words. I believe that the hon. member's intentions were very, very well focused, and he has the right ideas, but I don't think this is the answer. I just want to let him know that I think it's the right idea even though I'm going to get up and vote against the bill. The reason for that is that I really think it would become an administrative nightmare. I think of the people today that go to gyms, belong to gyms, lots of them pay gym memberships and don't get there, as the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright was saying. They already can afford to go to a gym. They can afford to put their children into sports.

I think you'll find that for most of the people that can't afford to do that today, because of the good tax regime we have in Alberta, if they can't afford to go to those things now, they probably don't need the tax break. They probably are already in a low enough tax bracket that this tax break won't help them enough to be able to afford those memberships. I think that we do, by all means, have to find ways to get people more involved. We need more Participation, as they used to say all the time, and I think that we need to address the fact of: how do we get our children to get out of the obese ways that are there? But I don't think this bill is the answer to do the job, Mr. Speaker. Therefore, I won't be supporting the bill.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

**Mr. Rogers:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today with pleasure to join the debate on Bill 206, the Alberta Personal Income Tax (Physical Activity Credit) Amendment Act, sponsored by the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed. Bill 206 proposes to increase participation in physical activity amongst Albertans in accordance with the government's objective of promoting healthy living, and I think that's a very good thing.

5:00

Mr. Speaker, this bill recognizes that physical activity can act as a preventative measure against health complications and may lessen

the impact on Alberta's health care industry. By providing incentives to encourage Albertans to be more active, the benefits of this bill would seem to fall in line with many of the goals and initiatives of this government and, of course, the Department of Health and Wellness.

This government believes in the importance of activities and lifestyles that improve overall health as well as the importance of education and awareness. The Healthy U program, for example, supports and encourages Albertans to lead healthier lifestyles by providing them with access to specific information, advice, and tips on healthy eating and active living. As you know, a lot of the problems that we have today are because people are making very unhealthy choices in terms of what they eat, of course, combined with a very inactive lifestyle. The term "couch potato" I don't believe was something in our lexicon too many years ago, and certainly it can be used to describe many people, unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, that you and I are all too familiar with today.

The Healthy U action plan was developed from recommendations of the report from the Premier's Advisory Council on Health, and its focus, Mr. Speaker, is on improving the health of Albertans and helping Albertans stay healthy. The goals of the Healthy U program are to encourage and support Albertans to become more physically active and, of course, as I mentioned earlier, in eating healthier and more wisely, increase the number of Albertans who are physically active, and also increase the number of Albertans who eat a balanced diet, following the very familiar Canada's food guide to healthy eating. Within Healthy U are activities geared toward generating awareness and motivating Albertans to make healthier choices each day.

The Community Choosewell Challenge, Mr. Speaker, for example, is designed to recognize Alberta communities for innovative programming, promotion, participation, and community partnerships that demonstrate progress in fitness and health. This means that 124 communities are encouraging their residents to make changes in their physical activity and eating habits.

Healthy U also promotes health and nutrition through the Snackivity Box. Try saying that one fast. The Snackivity Box, Mr. Speaker, was provided to 1,800 daycares and day homes across Alberta to provide caregivers and parents with a simple way of creating healthy environments for the young children in their charge. It contains information on the four food groups, Canada's physical activity guide for children, the Snackivity booklet, a recipe book, and cards for games and activities such as charades and a parade. It's never too early to teach children about healthy choices.

Promoting physical activity and healthy eating as part of an everyday lifestyle to preschool children may go a long way to increasing the likelihood that they will form healthy habits at a young age, ones that they will carry forward with them as they grow if we ingrain these habits in them. I remember that there was a term my father used to use, Mr. Speaker. He said: bend the tree when it's young. I believe that this particular program would do just that: bend the tree when it is in fact bendable.

In keeping with this, Alberta Health and Wellness and Healthy U established the Alberta healthy school community wellness fund to address issues of health and wellness among children and youth within school communities. The fund supports projects that promote healthy school communities and aims to improve the health and wellness of school-age children and youth.

One of the success stories to emerge out of this action included a project to create sustainable active leadership in this area and was sponsored by Olds College, David Thompson health region as it existed at the time, the town of Olds, and Chinook's Edge school division. Now, this project, Mr. Speaker, enables students to

become youth wellness leaders, so ambassadors, if I may, to youths. They're able to share their knowledge with rural students and their communities while actively engaging stakeholders to support the creation of a student-led healthy school community wellness plan. Now, in the end it goes a long way to educating rural students about a variety of school and community wellness activities and initiatives to address healthy living.

Now, another good initiative under the Healthy U program that encourages Albertans to be healthy is called Healthy U @ work, Mr. Speaker – maybe we could try that in here – which promotes healthy lifestyles within organizations. Healthy U @ work benefits both the employee and the employer as the health of employees influences productivity and ultimately an organization's bottom line. If you want to get a corporation's attention, I think we just have to focus on the bottom line. It goes without saying that promoting this type of lifestyle in the workplace is good for the employee, but it's also going to be good for the employer's bottom line. The workplace is an ideal setting for increasing awareness around active living because of the benefits of increased social support within group settings and the use of individually based consultations.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the member for Calgary-Lougheed for bringing this bill forward as it has provided an important opportunity to highlight the positive work of the Healthy U program and Alberta Health and Wellness. It has also allowed for worthwhile discussion on the importance of living a healthy lifestyle. Clearly, Mr. Speaker, Bill 206 will encourage Albertans to adopt physical activity into their lives in order to reap the various benefits from reducing health risks. However, many government of Alberta programs like Healthy U help to educate and assist Albertans in adopting healthy eating and physical fitness in their daily lives.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I have to say that I'm unsure at this point whether an incentive like the one proposed in Bill 206 is necessary or that it will increase the number of Albertans who are currently active, since many are already utilizing and benefiting from programs like Healthy U. Although the approach is innovative, Bill 206 unfortunately may be redundant in its promotion of health and wellness through physical fitness, based on what our government is currently hearing.

For that reason, Mr. Speaker, I certainly would encourage the rest of my colleagues. I'd love to hear some more debate on this, and I look forward to hearing what others have to say. I'll reserve my judgment on the bill at this point.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Are there any other members who wish to speak on Bill 206? The hon. Member for Strathcona.

**Mr. Quest:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will be brief. I've been a believer in exercise for years. I haven't climbed any Himalayas or anything like that, but I have in the last couple of years worked up to a couple of half marathons. My health has been excellent, and I think my health has been excellent because I have exercised regularly for about the last 20 years.

A gym is not for the elite. If you go to a gym, you'll see people from all walks of life. You'll see the bodybuilder. You'll see the girl with the six-pack. But the most impressive person in that gym is the one that's carrying a few extra pounds that's over there in the corner quietly working with the personal trainer. You've got to ask yourself: what got that person motivated to go? Once they've started and once they're into a routine, they may well maintain that routine and get us to where we want to be.

I don't think anybody looks at whether they might be diabetic years from now or suffer from heart disease. Most of us don't look that far ahead. That's not a motivator. We can all hear the numbers.

That's fine. That's not what gets us going. Anything we can do to get that person off the couch, away from the video game, into an exercise facility, just to get him moving, is something that we need to do. We will see the benefit in the long term. I guarantee it.

Again, I know from my own experience. I wasn't the fittest guy when I was in my 20s, but as I got going, as I got started – I should share a comment. I started running when I was in my 30s. My knees hurt and my shins hurt, and it was just kind of generally uncomfortable. I said to my doctor, "I don't understand why this is happening." He said, "What are you doing differently?" I said, "I just started running." He goes, "What did you think you'd feel like when you started running in your 30s?"

The point is that I did start, and once you start, you keep going. I think that's what we're attempting to do here, and I think it'll work. If we can get people started, they'll keep themselves going, and for that reason I am fully supportive of this bill.

5:10

**The Deputy Speaker:** Any other members who wish to speak on this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

**Mr. Benito:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to speak in favour of Bill 206. It is my pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill 206, the Alberta Personal Income Tax (Physical Activity Credit) Amendment Act, 2008. Bill 206 is designed to motivate Alberta's children, youth, and adults to increase their participation in physical activity.

Physical activity is an essential part of a serious strategy that is focused on addressing the problems stemming from sedentary living and obesity among our population. I believe this bill demonstrates a level of commitment in moving beyond what we may think of as the traditional means of approaching health, wellness, and longevity. Albertans are living longer and enjoying more out of life than ever before. Despite some of the warning signs we see and hear about obesity and the related health complications, we also see many positives. Even though we are busier than ever before, many Albertans are striving for more balance in their lives. They are making time for sport, recreation, and physical activity, that is important to them and allows them to spend time with friends, family, neighbours, or coworkers outside of the home or office environment.

The value of this is the camaraderie and team spirit that can develop that helps to build relationships and memories, all of which contributes to overall mental well-being and longevity. Ultimately, it also helps to build better communities and even a better Alberta.

The health benefits of physical activity are undeniable, and many of my colleagues today will likely delve into the physiological benefits. Regular physical activity certainly has significant benefits, and even modest increases can have enhancing effects, but I think there may also be a larger social gain to be had from what Bill 206 would accomplish. Mr. Speaker, more children and young adults today are overweight or obese than ever before. This is of particular concern because excess body weight in children can easily move into adolescence and young adulthood, increasing the risk of health complications.

Even more, encouraging our young people to participate in sport and physical activity and providing easier means for them to do so also reduces the time spent on unhealthy behaviour. At the very least it provides an alternative. In this way, active living contributes to more than physical and mental health but also to social capital and community well-being. The more active we are in our communities, the more opportunities we have to meet the people in them.

I'm one of the examples, being a practitioner of martial arts. I think the discipline that you can get from doing this type of sport and

physical activity will help you develop good discipline and probably help you become a better MLA in the community. All of this helps to increase the extent to which we identify with our communities and become a part of them.

Particularly for youth, time spent on physical activity may decrease the amount of time spent on socially unhealthy behaviour and even crime. By promoting physical activity and allowing our youth the opportunity to participate and further identify with their communities, community problems attributed to youth crime may be lessened. We are at least helping to create the environment and the incentive for positive behaviour to flourish. This is where the question of access becomes increasingly important, particularly in urban centres and lower income environments. Increasing access to facilities which promote and allow for physical activity helps us to reduce the likelihood of destructive or less socially beneficial behaviour.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 206 creates the potential for the government of Alberta to work with, for, and alongside our communities. By building even more co-operative relationships, we help to establish partnerships that can endure. This supports two key Alberta government priorities: establishing safe and secure communities and enhancing the quality of life of all Albertans. Bill 206 provides an excellent opportunity for the government of Alberta to continue to take a leadership role and invest in Albertans.

As such, Mr. Speaker, I'm in full support of Bill 206 and would encourage all Members of the Legislative Assembly to show their support as well. Thank you very much.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Any other members who wish to join the debate on Bill 206?

Seeing none, I'll call on the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed to close the debate.

**Mr. Rodney:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. For those who were complaining about nothing worth watching when it came to the last federal election, perhaps they are tuning in to see some pretty lively debate here. I can't wait to see how this vote is going to end up.

I would like to begin by sincerely thanking everyone who got up to speak today for or against. It is obvious from all comments that health and wellness and quality of life are extremely important to everyone in this Chamber, even if we can't completely agree on certain specifics of this legislation. You know, we often talk about the necessity to do more, to treat the causes of problems rather than the symptoms, to be out in front of problems rather than simply being in a position of deciding how to stop their proliferation. This is an opportunity to do exactly that.

Some members have pointed out that Bill 206 does not lay out an exhaustive list of activities which would or would not qualify, nor does it lay out exact criteria used to determine such, but that's due to the fact that these kinds of specifics, as per normal, are determined by the departments, as they rightly should be. I look forward to working with those professionals who are qualified and knowledgeable in these areas to make the most appropriate of determinations. That's how we ensure effectiveness, and that's how we ensure results.

We all know that physical activity does have specific measurable health benefits which affect our hearts, our minds, and much more. It reduces symptoms. It improves outcomes for many afflictions, including heart and respiratory disease, diabetes, obesity, anxiety, depression, and much, much more. I find it baffling that anyone could ever suggest that the intent of this bill might be to legislate behaviour. It's quite the contrary. We're not telling people what they can do, and we're not telling them what they cannot do.

Instead, we're simply supporting Albertans who are already taking the personal responsibility to live healthy lifestyles and are teaching their kids to do the same.

For those who are close to making that change to a healthier lifestyle, the incentive of a tax credit might just be the motivation they need. The value of incentives is precisely that they have the ability to motivate. They support and encourage us to make better choices and live better lives. I hope that's what everyone takes away from this discussion.

I thank those who supported the goals of Bill 206. I look forward to addressing specific concerns raised this afternoon as we hopefully discuss it further in Committee of the Whole.

Before people vote, Mr. Speaker, I want to remind all members that this is a good-news piece of legislation. It is a carrot rather than a stick. It's designed to reward those who invest in their own health, geared towards all Albertans, not just kids or youth, like the federal bill, but adults as well. Our government's most important objectives include promoting healthy living in our province, and this goes exactly with that. Increased physical activity plays a significant preventative role in health. It reduces health complications. It's about stopping that incredible drain on our health care resources. This is a huge return on investment.

What has the reaction been since this has been launched, Mr. Speaker? I've been amazed by media contacting me from all over the country. They've expressed great interest. But much more importantly, Albertans on the street in various locations around the province have been very excited, saying: "How soon can I apply? I really love your bill."

5:20

Now, we have a responsibility to ourselves and to our kids and, perhaps more importantly, a great opportunity because it's not just an individual problem we're dealing with here; it's a societal one. Being physically active is the easiest, most natural way to improve our health, to prevent disease and injury, and it is not bound by age or social group or sex. Physical activity reduces the risk of too many diseases to list here. Here's the point: prevention is cited over and over by all major experts and people on the street as the major contributor to better health, increased life expectancy. Studies of health expenditures indicate that less than 5 per cent of our resources are dedicated to prevention. So in this way it is the areas of policy where advocacy and action can matter most.

Mr. Speaker, awareness is fine, but that's not nearly enough. Bill 206 takes the next logical necessary step. I have to say that for better or for worse, right or wrong, as human beings we sometimes do need a little incentive and support to encourage us to make better choices. An incentive may not be a magic bullet, and it's not intended to be. It's about reducing the likelihoods and controlling what we can. The value of incentives is that they motivate. I hope people are motivated here to be realistic and not exclusive and, indeed, vote to discuss this further in Committee of the Whole.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and all members.

[Motion carried; Bill 206 read a second time]

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

**Mr. Renner:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the hour and the fact that we've made good progress on this bill and it might for continuity purposes be nice to have the debate on the next bill come about the same day as the member introduces it, I would suggest that we now adjourn until 7:30 this evening.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:23 p.m.]





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