



Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

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The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

First Session

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Forsyth, Heather, Calgary-Fish Creek (W)
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Fraser, Rick, Calgary-South East (PC)
Fritz, Yvonne, Calgary-Cross (PC)
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Xiao, David H., Edmonton-McClung (PC)
Young, Steve, Edmonton-Riverview (PC),
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Party standings:

Progressive Conservative: 61

Wildrose: 17

Alberta Liberal: 5

New Democrat: 4

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, May 8, 2013

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Let us pray. Dear Lord, help us to think, to act, and to live in a manner that instills confidence amongst Albertans and reassures those who elected us that they made the right choices. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through to all members of the Assembly someone who will be well known to many colleagues, Judy Gordon. Judy is a former member of this House who had the privilege of serving the old constituency of Lacombe-Stettler. She is with us today to acknowledge Multiple Sclerosis Awareness Month, which occurs every May. Mrs. Gordon is an MS Society board member and honorary ambassador in the fight against multiple sclerosis. She's seated in your gallery. She's an excellent ambassador for the causes related to multiple sclerosis. I would ask her to rise, please, and receive our traditional warm welcome.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. President of Treasury Board, you have a school group to introduce?

Mr. Horner: Yes, I do, Mr. Speaker. In fact, I've got a very large school group from Spruce Grove, the Greystone Centennial middle school, 118 visitors in both of our galleries, and they are a very energetic group. We were doing the pictures downstairs, as we normally do, and I think I may have to look at shaving off the grey because one of them thought I was the Premier's father. This very notable group is accompanied by their teachers and their group leaders, Patty Nicholls, Claudia Scanga, Joan Papp, Laura Robert, Mathew Pecht, Cheryl Hanson, and Patricia Kusmire. As I said, they are in both of our galleries, and I would ask that they now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there other school groups?

Seeing none, let us proceed on with other guests.

The hon. Minister of Health, followed by Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House some additional guests that have joined us today in recognition of Multiple Sclerosis Awareness Month. These individuals are role models and true leaders within our community in the fight against MS.

I'd ask that each rise as I introduce them: Neil Pierce, who has served as the president of the MS Society of Alberta for the past eight years and has been a tremendous advocate for MS awareness in our communities; Julie Kelndorfer, who was diagnosed with MS nine years ago and began working at the MS Society in order to make a difference in the lives of others affected by this illness – and made a difference she has – and Dr. Christopher Power, an

internationally recognized clinician-scientist focused on the causes and potential treatment methods of diseases like multiple sclerosis. He is also a board member for the MS Society here in Alberta. Last but certainly not least, Patrycia Rzechowka. Patrycia was diagnosed with MS last January and recently graduated from the U of A with a BA in criminology. She aspires to become a police officer and has raised close to \$13,000 for MS research.

Mr. Speaker, multiple sclerosis is a lifelong chronic illness that can occur at any age, but with individuals such as our distinguished guests, who are dedicated to combating this disease, I am hopeful and confident that we will one day find a cure.

All these guests are seated in your gallery, and I would ask that all members of the Assembly give them the traditional warm welcome and appreciation of this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The other Saturday I was listening to CBC, and there was my favourite program, *The Irrelevant Show*. I thought: "Hot damn. That is a comedy show that is produced out of Edmonton. It is a national program, and it's into its fourth year." I thought: "Okay. That's it. We have to bring in some of the company and introduce them to you so you can all celebrate with them."

Now, *The Irrelevant Show* has won both the Canadian comedy award and a medal at the prestigious New York Festivals. We were not able to get Neil Grahm here with us today, whom I remember from *Three Dead Trolls in a Baggie*, which tells you how old I am. Neil is the head writer along with names you'll recognize like Chris Craddock and Dana Andersen, who help to write the show. I'd like to introduce you to the people we did get here. All four of them are part of the original company.

Mark Meer, if you would rise. Mark is a writer and a performer. We met when he was still in high school, I think. He is a member of *Die-Nasty Improv*. He's a founder of Gordon's Big Bald Head. He has written and performed in *Caution: May Contain Nuts*, which is another television comedy show, toured all over the place with Rapid Fire Theatre, and you'll recognize his voice from video games. Jana, stand up and join him. Jana: you would recognize her voice if she was allowed to speak to you. You've heard it many times. She's worked as an actor, an improviser, a theatre instructor, and a playwright. I think she started or had a hand in starting the Sprouts festival, which is for small kids.

Donovan Workun: you will recognize him from a number of different commercials and things. He's a founding member of Atomic Improv. He's won both the Just for Laughs Festival and the world improv championships in Los Angeles. He is very proud to have with him today his son and daughter, Ethan and Emma. Please rise.

Finally, the guy who thought it all up. Peter Brown is the producer. He grew up in Saskatoon. A chance radio audition changed his career path. He for many years did *Radio Active* and is now going to host a network radio show and take us across Canada.

Thank you so much for being so wonderful.

Ms Kubinec: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly two of my constituents, Mr. Earl Allen and Mr. John Podolski. Both are proud farmers from the BMW Fawcett-Jarvie area in the north part of my constituency. I sat with both of these gentlemen on the Linaria agricultural society in the '90s, when our sons played hockey together. They are dedicated volunteers in our community,

as are many of their fellow Albertans. This is their first visit to the Legislature. I ask them to rise as I call their names. Please receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly, John and Earl.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Aboriginal Relations, followed by Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Campbell: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly two constituents from Edson, Gean Chouinard and his son Ryan. Gean is a first-time councillor with the town of Edson and is very involved in the community. He has helped out with a dozen initiatives, including Edson's Rotary Sundays in the Park and the Family Day extravaganza and organizes the town's annual soapbox derby. Gean is also a foster parent and has been involved in the Foster Parent Association for many years.

1:40

His son Ryan is a grade 6 honours student at Pine Grove middle school and is a remarkable young man. In fact, Mr. Speaker, he received the Edson Chamber of Commerce youth volunteer award this year. He has also helped out with many initiatives, including the Pine Grove school breakfast program and the Rotary Sundays in the Park.

Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to say that both Gean and Ryan were very active members in my campaign last year, and Ryan was actually appointed as my chief sign guy. Gean and Ryan are seated in the members' gallery, and I invite them to please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks, followed by Lesser Slave Lake.

Mr. Hale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislature a group of concerned citizens from the city of Brooks. They're here today to raise their concerns to this government in hopes that their parents and all Alberta seniors receive the level of care they deserve. As I call their names, I would ask them to rise: Cheryl Hyland, Darlene Deschamps, Sheila Eaton, Glenn Eaton, Reid DeForest, Jack Peeters, Gina Smith, and Roberta Brower. Also, there are two health care workers here today who don't want their names announced for fear of retribution. I ask that all members join me in providing the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake, followed by the leader of the Liberal opposition.

Ms Calahasen: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I have the great honour of introducing to you and through you an individual who has family connected to High Prairie. He was born and raised in High Prairie, Alberta, went to the international university in San Diego to get a bachelor of science, and is now the product marketing manager, warehouse products, for Toyota Material Handling Europe and lives in Sweden. He has come to see what kind of possibilities exist here for business. I know that he is so thrilled to be introduced in this House as his father was a really great campaigner of mine. I'd ask Joe Cunningham, who I believe is sitting in the public gallery, to please stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we have about 10 more to go, and I'm watching the clock, so please tighten up your introductions wherever possible.

The hon. leader of the Liberal opposition, followed by the Associate Minister of IIR.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I have two introductions. The first is a young fellow by the name of Will Lumsden. Will is currently attending the University of Alberta. He introduced Justin Trudeau to Edmonton when he launched his leadership campaign. He sits on the board of the Edmonton-Riverview constituency association. He was recently elected as the vice-president of policy for the Alberta Young Liberals. I know Will Lumsden will be sitting in one of these chairs one day, fighting for Albertans. I would ask him to rise and for all the members to give him the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, it's also my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Marjorie Bencz, Mark Doram, Cheryl Natrass, and Roxann Vaos from the Edmonton food bank. Alberta is one of the best places. A lot of people are doing great, but unfortunately there are a lot of families that are going through a tough time. Closer to home 53,512 Albertans are assisted by the food banks, with 44 per cent of those served being children. Hunger Awareness Week is about raising awareness of the solvable problem of hunger in Canada. Food banks across Canada are asking all Canadians to acknowledge Hunger Awareness Week and understand that as a collective, as a society we can all make a difference. I would ask all hon. members today to use Facebook and Twitter and use our social media networks to get the word out to go to hungerawarenessweek.ca or foodbankscanada.ca, and the Twitter hash tag is #yegfoodbank. I would ask our members from the food bank to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Associate Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations, followed by Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House four constituents from the Calgary-Northern Hills constituency who are sitting in the members' gallery. I would like to ask them to stand as I introduce them. Karim Dossa is a successful entrepreneur with a recycling business and is director of the Beverage Container Management Board. He is also a very active volunteer and leader with the Ismaili community, serving youth and a multifaith food bank and Aga Khan Development Network projects. Mr. Khin Chew is a professional engineer with an impressive record of community involvement and leadership. Khin is present at almost all Asian community events in Calgary and has been heard at several disaster relief efforts. Mr. Mark Gerlitz is a native Calgarian and a lawyer of 11 years. He and his wife, ShariLyn, have a daughter they named Victoria. Mark is also a board member of the Alberta Safety Codes Council. Ms Holly Wong is a health services researcher at the U of C. Her passion is women's issues and rights, particularly women in the correctional system. Holly is going to India in a few weeks to volunteer in a program that promotes women's empowerment.

I'm pleased to hear that they had a chance today to meet with some of my colleagues and tour the Alberta Legislature Building, and now they're here to listen to us in question period. I would like to thank all of you for taking time out to visit us here today, and I would like to ask the members of the Assembly to join me in giving them the warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: Hon. members, once again I beg your indulgence. Please review your introductions from this moment forward, or we're not going to quite make it in time.

Edmonton-Gold Bar to demonstrate, followed by Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Dorward: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly three exceptional individuals that I know, two from the Edmonton-Gold Bar constituency: Mufi Khairullah, Shelley Sabo, and Dicky Tshipamba Dikamba. Shelley is a home co-ordinator for SEESA, the South East Edmonton Seniors Association, and works hard in the community. Dicky runs an organization called the Canadian association of volunteers in action, a francophone organization that finds volunteers and matches them up with the need. Mufi has been a friend of mine for many, many years and works in the recruitment area, particularly in IT, indeed for the government of Alberta. Please welcome these individuals sitting in the members' gallery.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw, followed by the Minister of Environment and SRD.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Eryn Kelly. Eryn is with the March of Dimes, a wonderful organization. I had the great pleasure of spending the morning with her while I was in a wheelchair as part of accessibility awareness week. She also happens to be a constituent of mine in Calgary-Shaw. I would like to ask Eryn to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development, followed by Calgary-Glenmore.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a dear friend of mine. He's a great community volunteer, a gentleman with a forestry background and business background, and certainly one of Drayton Valley's very fine volunteers. He's a member of the Rotary Club and a great Rotarian but, most importantly, a dear friend of mine and the president of my Drayton Valley-Devon PC association. Colin Campbell, will you please rise and receive the welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, followed by Sherwood Park.

Ms L. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you Mr. Dennis Fendall, an active community member of Calgary-Glenmore. Dennis was a school principal and a superintendent with the Calgary separate school board. With the selection of Premier Redford as the leader of the PC Party of Alberta, Mr. Fendall became re-engaged in party politics, and during the 2012 election campaign Dennis was a key member of the Liberals for Linda campaign in Calgary-Glenmore. I now ask Dennis to rise and accept the traditional welcome of the Legislature.

The Speaker: Just a remembrance that we're not to refer to elected members by their names.

The hon. Member for Sherwood Park, followed by Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Ms Olesen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to rise before you and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly two of my constituents and long-time friends. [interjections] I'll start with Mr. Ed Riediger. [interjections] Ed is the CEO of the Robin Hood Association, an organization committed to helping people with disabilities.

The Speaker: Hon. members, please. We're already fighting the clock, and you're not helping by having conversations across the bow, which prompt my rising. The Member for Sherwood Park has the floor. Let's give her the courtesy of it.

Ms Olesen: Thank you. I'll start again. I don't think anyone heard.

It's my pleasure today to rise before you and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly two of my constituents and long-time friends. I'll start with Mr. Ed Riediger. Ed is the CEO of the Robin Hood Association, a school for disabilities and an organization committed to helping people with disabilities achieve their personal best and experience a quality lifestyle.

1:50

Next is Gerry Gabinet. He is the director of economic development and tourism for Strathcona county. He has helped attract and promote investment in Sherwood Park, Strathcona county, and Alberta.

I am so pleased they're able to join us today, and I would now ask that you provide them with the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly. Thank you.

Speaker's Ruling Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, we still have introductions from Edmonton-Ellerslie, the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, the Minister of Human Services, St. Albert, Lacombe-Ponoka, and one other place. However, our agreement with the television network requires us to now move to question period. I'm sorry, hon. members who are left at the altar, so to speak. Some of the introductions took a very long time today. I would ask, please, House leaders to again review this matter. Let's tighten this up so that all members can be introduced. Some people are here and have to leave and will not have the benefit of being here when their introductions are done after QP, and that is highly unfortunate. You have yourselves to look at.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition. First official question.

Report to Taxpayers

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, I was reading through this PC Party brochure, that the Premier is claiming is legitimate government communications to explain how the back-in-debt budget is supposed to be good for Alberta. It is a glossy document. It's got lots of pretty pictures and nice words, and it's all decked out in PC campaign colours, but it doesn't really tell the whole story. For example, the Premier and the Finance minister insist that borrowing and debt are good for Albertans, but I couldn't find one mention in the entire brochure that the government will rack up \$17 billion in debt by 2016. Why not?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, if I may, what the document talks about is where this province is headed under this Premier's leadership. What the document talks about is living within our means. It talks about saving for the future. The hon. members opposite don't talk about the \$24 billion of savings that the three-year plan will put in the bank for Albertans. They don't talk about the \$19 billion that we have in savings today. This is a plan for the future of the province. We don't drive the vehicle by looking in the rear-view mirror, like the opposition.

Ms Smith: And they don't like to talk about the \$17 billion they drained from our sustainability fund in the last five years.

Mr. Speaker, if the government is going to communicate with Albertans, it could at least tell the full story about what it's doing. The campaign-style brochure claims that Alberta's borrowing is much like taking out a mortgage on a home. This is not true. They're only going to be paying the interest. They are paying none of the principal and setting aside next to nothing when the balloon payment comes due. They are leaving \$17 billion for the next generation to pay off. No one has a home mortgage like that. When will they tell Albertans the truth about that?

Mr. Horner: You know, Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member would actually read the budget documents, she would see that we have a debt retirement plan and we have a debt retirement account to which we have made an allocation in this budget year and will make in the future budget years.

She should also take a look at the P3 projects that have served Albertans so tremendously well. I saw a report produced by one of our deputy ministers not too long ago that showed a savings in the value of \$2 billion for things like the Anthony Henday, which I think Edmontonians are very grateful for and which is, by the way, a liability for 30 years, a debt, Mr. Speaker. Albertans understand how we should build infrastructure; the opposition does not.

Ms Smith: I've read their budget, Mr. Speaker. At the rate the minister is going, it'll take 83 years to pay back that \$17 billion in debt.

It's a \$350,000 infomercial being spent to misinform Albertans. Here's another example. They describe the 8 per cent MLA pay raise as a pay cut. Plus, it's designed to look like a PC Party document. It's another communications disaster on the heels of the school announcement blunder, that was using kids as a backdrop for political attacks. Yet the Premier and her ministers continue to hire more and more PR and communications experts from Ontario. Doesn't the Premier realize that it's these kinds of mistakes that are making Albertans . . .

Mr. Horner: You know, Mr. Speaker, one of the things that I've found as a representative of this august Assembly is that when I go outside of this place, my constituents say: "Well, why don't you tell us what you're doing? Why don't you show us what you're doing? Why aren't you telling us what these folks are trying to misinterpret and give, basically, false statements about?" [interjections] Sending 29 cents to every household so that they can see that we are building Alberta, that we are living within our means, that we are going to save for their children's tomorrow: this is a plan for today and tomorrow. [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition. Second main set of questions, without interjections, please.

Ms Smith: They're billing Alberta, Mr. Speaker, and they're not being forthright about it.

Health System Executive Expenses

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, in light of the Mayo Clinic expense scandal, we wrote a letter asking Justice Vertes if he would expand his health care inquiry, and we received a response from him this week. He said this.

Your request is one that should be addressed in the Legislature.

Any expansion or alteration to the Commission's terms of reference is solely within the purview of the Minister of Health and his cabinet colleagues.

Will the minister join us in our request for a complete examination of health expenses in order to clear the air on queue-jumping once and for all?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, the inquiry has done a very thorough job of investigating all sorts of allegations that have been made. As the hon. member knows, the commissioner asked for and received an extension in order for him to have time to consider the evidence that's been submitted and to prepare the report. The inquiry has fulfilled its mandate or will shortly fulfill its mandate when it delivers its report to you. We have no intention of otherwise interfering with the work of the inquiry.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, the government's response to the health executive expense account abuse has been disappointing to say the least. The standard answer is that they've tightened up the policy. Of course, after we exposed the Mayo Clinic expense scandal a few weeks ago, they started to see if there was a way to recover some of those illegitimate expenses, but they refuse to order a complete forensic audit. Why is the Premier only taking half measures to recover these dollars on behalf of Alberta taxpayers?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, the Premier has in fact taken very aggressive measures with respect to all of the allegations that have been brought forward in this House. The fact is that the inquiry has heard evidence on many subjects throughout the course of the last year. The commissioner is in the process of reviewing that evidence and preparing his report. Unlike the hon. member opposite, we are looking forward to the report and its recommendations in order to further strengthen the steps we have taken to ensure this kind of thing can never happen again in Alberta.

Ms Smith: This is where it gets confusing, Mr. Speaker. Either they care about the waste of taxpayer dollars on executive health expenses, which, frankly, go back to the time when the Government House Leader was the Health minister, or they don't care about recovering these expenses. If they're serious, asking Justice Wachowich to get involved is a good step one. Step two would be the release of all of the expenses for all of the executives for all of the health regions going back to 2005. Why won't they do that?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, as I'm sure the hon. member well knows, in fact, all of the expenses of all of the executives of all of the former health regions back to 2005 are all the subject of FOIP requests that are presently in process. That is a process that occurs independent of government. We have absolutely no intention of interfering with that process. The opposition has proven it knows how to use the process, how to disclose and, if I may say, in some cases distort the information that's presented. We stand by that process.

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

Assisted Living Facilities in Brooks

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, let me start by acknowledging the efforts of the Minister of Health. I understand the couple in Crowsnest Pass that I spoke about last month will be permitted to stay together in the same seniors' facility. Today I hope he will address major issues in two seniors' care facilities in Brooks. Carla Buckler told us about often finding her grandfather sitting in a soaked diaper and getting bruised from being moved too roughly from his recliner to his wheelchair and her grandmother being fed poor quality meals such as half a hot dog and a brown banana. This is elder abuse. Why are there no consequences?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, let me say, first of all, that there are certainly very serious consequences in this province for individuals who neglect or otherwise mistreat seniors. The hon. member should know that she has an obligation, as does any other Albertan, to report suspicions or evidence of such inappropriate treatment under the Protection for Persons in Care Act, and I won't take the House's time to enlighten her as to what that process is. What I will say is that I am concerned about the situation in Brooks. It was first brought to my attention today in a news release, and I've taken immediate steps to ensure that there is an inspection of both facilities forthwith.

Ms Smith: This is precisely what we're doing, Mr. Speaker, bringing it to the attention of the minister.

Here is what Tia Crapo told us about care in one of these facilities in Brooks.

My dad was found on the floor, in his vomit, with not one person aware of when he was last checked on. When admitted to the hospital, weak, severely dehydrated, suffering with a urine infection, and several bed sores, the doctors were shocked at the state he was in and did not think he would survive the night.

Why do these kinds of things happen without the minister intervening and holding anyone responsible?

2:00

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, first of all, as I said, the information that's been brought forward with respect to the two facilities in Brooks will be followed up. Those facilities are inspected on a regular basis, as are all facilities in the province regardless of whether they're publicly operated, private, or not-for-profit operations.

But, Mr. Speaker, this hon. member is teetering on the verge of something that is very serious. If she is alleging that there has been abuse or neglect of residents in these facilities, she or anyone else who has knowledge has a responsibility to report that under the appropriate legislation.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, they've reported it. It's been ignored, and now the minister needs to step in and do something about it.

You've already been introduced to several people in the galleries affected by unacceptable care and lax enforcement of existing standards.

An Hon. Member: Fearmongering.

Ms Smith: Well, maybe the hon. member would like to go hear the stories himself if he thinks it's fearmongering.

They have many more heart-wrenching stories about neglect, lack of attention, horrible food, and ignored requests. The families and the caregivers have come here today to the Legislature to seek action. What is the minister going to do about it?

Mr. Horne: We, in fact, have tremendous compassion for any Alberta resident or family that would find themselves in such circumstances, and we have taken the appropriate steps. The hon. member's constituents and community representatives should be commended for coming to the Legislature today to express their concerns.

What would not be forgivable, Mr. Speaker, is a politicization of this issue. As I've said, the processes are in place. I've asked for an immediate inspection of both facilities. If there are concerns with regard to abuse or neglect, I'm sure the hon. member knows how to handle that.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the Alberta Liberal opposition.

Report to Taxpayers (continued)

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I looked through the Premier's leadership review campaign brochure, produced by the increasingly partisan Public Affairs Bureau, paid for with \$350,000 of taxpayer money. Now, if this leadership review brochure told the truth about the Premier's broken promises, I'd have no problem with it. However, it's nothing but a spin job. To the Premier: why does your leadership review brochure not mention your broken promise to provide all-day kindergarten within a year of being elected?

Speaker's Ruling **Questions about Political Party Activity**

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader rose on a point of order at 2:03, and I suspect it's to do with issues pertaining to party matters, which have no place in this Assembly. Hon. leader of the Liberal opposition, please review your supplementary questions so that they can be ruled in order. Party matters are not the subject of debate here. I've indicated this a number of times, and if you wish to rewrite the history of tradition, then so be it. However, in the meantime we're not going to allow that. I made it very clear yesterday, and we're going to pursue those rules today.

If someone from the government side would like to answer this question, please do so.

Report to Taxpayers (continued)

Mr. J. Johnson: Yeah. Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to ... [interjections]

The Speaker: Just a moment.

Hon. members on the Wildrose front bench, please. Enough. Okay? Enough.

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to try and answer the question. As we've said many times in this House, full-day kindergarten is a commitment of the government. It is important to the Premier. It is something we're working on. It is something we're going to deliver. But it is linked to the early childhood development strategy, that's being led by the Minister of Human Services in co-operation with the Minister of Health and myself,

and once we have that strategy nailed down and some of the costing on it, we'll be bringing those options forward to cabinet. We hope to be delivering full-day K in this province in the very near future. Again, it is a commitment. We are working on it, and we will get there.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, allow me to rephrase. What I referred to, that looked like a leadership campaign brochure, is actually a government document. I note that this document fails to mention the Premier's broken promise to provide sustainable, predictable funding to Alberta's postsecondary institutions. Not a single, solitary word about this is in this document. Whatever happened to truth in advertising? To the Premier. Why does your leadership review brochure – oh, excuse me. Why does this document fail to mention your devastating cuts to postsecondary education?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, I think it's highly appropriate and not only appropriate but desirable for government to communicate with Albertans and share information relevant to what the plan of the government is into the future, what achievements we have accomplished together, not this government but Albertans together, and where we're going to move with our economic development, with our financial plans, with our growth. Albertans want to hear that. If this opposition wasn't spreading the fearmongering that they do, perhaps we wouldn't have to do it, but unfortunately that is one of the means by which we will continue to communicate with Albertans.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, only with this government is the truth referred to as fearmongering.

I've only mentioned two broken promises out of this document. There are others, of course. Some examples are increased MSI funding, a very important issue today; increased art funding; no service cuts to those with PDD, our respected seniors; and, of course, a balanced budget. To the Premier: did you exclude all of your broken promises in this brochure because they're too politically damaging or because you wanted this to fit in the mailbox?

Mr. Horner: You know, Mr. Speaker, on the one hand the hon. member complains that this document may be political. Then on the next hand he talks about a political document that was issued a year ago, and why isn't this like that document? What this is information for Albertans in their households at 29 cents apiece so that they can understand what is in the budget because it's very obvious that the opposition does not.

The Speaker: The leader of the New Democrat opposition.

Alberta Energy Regulator

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Energy appointed Gerry Protti as chair of the regulator responsible for approving all energy projects in Alberta. It seems that Mr. Protti is listed as the vice-chair of the Energy Policy Institute of Canada, a lobby group representing the who's who of energy companies in Canada. He is himself a registered lobbyist for the energy industry. To the Energy minister: if Mr. Protti doesn't have a conflict of interest, then who does?

Mr. Hughes: Mr. Speaker, it's always good to get questions from the grassy-knoll group. It is quite clear that when Mr. Protti was asked to take on this role, he took all the steps to eliminate any potential conflicts such as those alluded to here, should there be such things. I would add, actually, that Mr. Protti is a very

fair-minded, straightforward, hard-working, and dedicated Albertan, that ought to be supported in his role.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, you know, this Energy minister can talk all he wants about how fair minded he is, but here's who he represents: the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers, Suncor, EnCana, the Canadian Energy Pipeline Association, CNRL, Enbridge, TransAlta, Aecon, Cenovus, Shell Canada, Imperial Oil, and the Canadian Petroleum Products Institute, to name just a few. This guy can't possibly take an objective view of projects involving any of these energy corporations. Why is this minister putting the fox in charge of the henhouse?

Mr. Hughes: Mr. Speaker, the governance board of the Alberta energy regulator will have responsibility for ensuring that the organization is well run, that it sets appropriate outcomes for the organization to perform. In addition to that, there will be a panel of independent commissioners, who will be put on the panels to hear specific cases as they come forward. I'd rather appoint somebody who actually knows what's going on as opposed to somebody who doesn't.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I really appreciated your prayer today because only divine intervention can save this government now. This government has made a farce of energy regulation in Alberta. If it wasn't so outrageous, it would be funny. How can this Energy minister justify turning one of the ministry's most serious responsibilities into a joke?

Mr. Hughes: Well, Mr. Speaker, if anybody was laughing, it would be a joke, but there isn't anybody who's laughing at that joke. I would say: what we're building, we haven't even started yet. I would encourage all even-minded, fair-minded Albertans to give us a chance to establish the board, to establish the organization. Let it get up and do its work. The proof is in the pudding.

Assisted Living Facilities in Brooks

(continued)

Mrs. Towle: Heartbreaking stories about mistreatment and neglect of our seniors have been heard from all over the province. In Brooks Hilda Bunney fell one night, and her head went through a wall. Hilda lay there for hours. The call bell didn't work. She suffered steam burns, fractured vertebrae, and two hematomas to her brain. No one called a nurse or an ambulance. This is not fearmongering. The family wrote letters to the ministry. The family made a complaint under the Protection for Persons in Care Act in 2011, and the RCMP will not investigate. When will the minister take action and end elder abuse in Alberta?

2:10

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, we take all allegations of elder abuse extremely seriously, and this government, I believe, has proven that in response to any member on any side of this House who has brought forward a concern about a constituent or wanted to represent a constituent's family. We will take these concerns equally seriously. As I've said, I've ordered an immediate inspection of both facilities. We do not believe these are widespread issues across our province – and I want to be very clear about that – but one incident is too many, and we'll continue to take aggressive action.

Mrs. Towle: This is not one incident, Minister.

Given that under the Protection for Persons in Care Act you, the minister, can launch your own investigation when “a report of serious abuse has been made about a service provider” and given that the horrifying stories of friends and family of AgeCare residents here today have already been provided to you, will the Minister of Health launch an investigation immediately into these AgeCare facilities?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, as with any similar situation, we will look at the information that is presented, and we will take immediate action to investigate the complaints.

Mrs. Towle: That’s great because they’re here today, and they’d love to meet with you right after QP, and they can go through their complaints with you.

Given that this ministry and the protections for persons in care and the RCMP are not able to protect seniors in our system, will the minister tell the families who are here today why this would be unacceptable if it was a daycare or an education facility, but you find it completely acceptable to do this to our seniors?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, this is really crossing a line. We take these allegations extremely seriously, and as members across this House can attest from their own experience, any time an allegation has been brought forward, we have investigated, and we have taken the appropriate action. It would be completely improper for me as minister to stand here and to draw or to speculate on conclusions resulting from the information that’s just been presented. We will take this matter as seriously as we take the circumstance of any other senior in this province.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park, followed by Calgary-Fish Creek.

High School Education Initiatives

Ms Olesen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This being Education Week, I want to focus on an issue that really matters to Alberta families. There are few issues of more importance to parents than having an educational environment that is going to help their child succeed. We know Alberta’s education system is effective and world class, but the only way to keep it that way is to make sure it continues to evolve. In fact, that was the message Albertans delivered through Inspiring Education. To the Minister of Education: is the system evolving as quickly as it needs to?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, that was the message Albertans gave us, and I’m very proud to say that in the last three years since Albertans developed the Inspiring Education vision, we’ve made significant steps and jumps to bring it to life. We’ve passed the Education Act this last year and made some alignments with Inspiring Education. We’ve had some great announcements this week with things like dual crediting, which was announced Monday, a high school flexibility program that was announced today, digital diploma exams yesterday, and a new ministerial order on student learning. Most importantly, we’re a hundred per cent focused on making sure our decisions are centred around the student.

Ms Olesen: Again to the same minister: given that Albertans said through Inspiring Education that the system as a whole needs to be responsive and flexible and given that high school students in my constituency are saying that elements of the system continue to be too prescriptive, will the minister take the kind of actions Albertans expect to address this concern?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is absolutely right. Kids are unique, and we need a system that embraces and recognizes that uniqueness and their capacity to learn. We’re doing just that with things like moving the diploma exams to more times throughout the year and even digital exams and the expansion of the high school flexibility program, which we announced today, which is essentially delinking the time kids sit at a desk from the credits they earn and tying it more to the mastery of their skills and their capacity to learn.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Olesen: Thank you. Finally, to the same minister: given that the minister can hardly expect success without the participation of students, teachers, and parents and given that the actions you’ve talked about include some significant changes and thinking outside the box, are stakeholders onboard with these specific changes, and how can we have confidence that they will be successful?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, they will only be successful if everyone is onboard, and I can tell you that during Inspiring Ed we had input from thousands of Albertans over several years, from young to old, because we’re all stakeholders in the education system. It doesn’t matter what you do, whether you’re a parent, a grandparent, whether you pump gas, whether you’re a senior in a lodge, or whether you’re a taxpayer or a part of government. We all benefit from the fact that we’ve got the best education system in the English-speaking world, and we’re all going to benefit from the fact that we’ve got a Premier who’s a hundred per cent committed to keeping us the best.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, followed by Calgary-Cross.

Assisted Living Facilities in Brooks

(continued)

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today we’ve heard some very sad stories about what’s happening in our province to our seniors. Minister, the family is here today. They’ve gone through all the processes of the Protection for Persons in Care Act and complained to the RCMP. Will you meet with them after question period?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, we will handle this situation the way we would handle a situation brought forward by any member of this House. We will look into the complaints that have been made. We will look at the history of the complaints under the Protection for Persons in Care Act and through correspondence, and we will get back directly to the families about the concerns they’ve raised.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Minister, we have some employees who worked at the care centre who have lost their jobs. Would you be willing to meet with them? They complained through the correct processes, and they’ve lost their jobs since. Would you meet with them?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, as I said, I ordered an immediate inspection under the continuing care health standards and the continuing care accommodation standards into these two facilities. As the hon. member knows and as the families know, there are processes, and they have obviously availed themselves of those processes. I will look into the status of the complaints that have

been made, and once we've had an opportunity to consider the facts and all the circumstances, we'll get back to them with a response.

Mrs. Forsyth: Minister, we have staff up in the gallery who currently work for the facility that we're complaining about. They're concerned about losing their jobs. Will you guarantee that they will not lose their jobs?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, this is a most unusual way to have concerns presented on behalf of constituents.

What we will do is what I have laid out with respect to the standards in the facilities and with respect to the complaints that have been filed. I do not believe that any employee in any facility in this province has to or should need to fear for their job as a result of advocating for the people they care for. I stand by that, and that will continue to be the case.

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

Family Violence Death Review Committee

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta has one of the highest rates of family violence in Canada, and in many cases children can be profoundly affected. They can be witnesses, they can be orphaned, or they can lose their lives. My questions are for the Minister of Human Services. I understand that the proposed family violence death review committee will only look at homicide-suicides that were committed in the context of an intimate partner relationship. My question is: how will this help children affected by such tragedy?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think there are two important aspects to that. The first is, of course, that children who are in a situation where there's family violence, particularly resulting in death, are demonstrably affected. The work of Dr. Fraser Mustard and others has shown the developmental impacts on the child who lives in a situation of family violence and is exposed to it. So understanding how we can prevent family violence is very important to the development of children.

Also, of course, sometimes children are involved in that family violence themselves and are the victims of that family violence, and we need to know and understand what we can do better to help families in that situation be protected from aggressors.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: since we have seen cases recently where a youth in an intimate partner relationship experienced dating violence as a precursor to a horrific tragedy, how will the death review committee improve the safety of youth who are presently at risk through dating violence?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Unfortunately, we are seeing an increasing number of violent incidents in dating relationships, so it's very important to understand that and to take that into account. Certainly, the family violence death review committee will be able to look at situations of intimate relationship, including dating, and understand what we can do better in that area.

The other piece that I would want to add is that we are currently reviewing our family violence and bullying reduction strategy and renewing it, and we're putting a particular focus on education about positive relationships and other areas to reduce the amount of dating violence.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

2:20

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you know, a very strong group of people in the community is already working to prevent family violence in our province. My question is to the same minister.

Mr. Saskiw: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mrs. Fritz: How is the death review committee going to work with the communities without overlapping their efforts?

Ms Blakeman: Mr. Speaker, point of order. Anticipation.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The family violence death review committee is something that the community and the stakeholders in this area have been asking for for a number of years. We've been working with the community in terms of developing a proposal for a family violence death review committee. If Bill 25 is passed by the Legislature, the community, I believe, will be very strongly supportive of us implementing what they've asked for.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, you rose on a point of order at 2:19:30, and hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, you rose on a point of order at 2:19:40. They've both been noted.

Let's carry on. Edmonton-Centre, you have the floor, followed by Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Athabasca River Water Management

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. This government has not been exactly rigorous in ensuring that some water will be left in the Athabasca River. Since the mid-70s the low-flow rate for this river has decreased by 30 per cent due to climate change, but the government has allowed current and future licences for 15 per cent more water flow to be removed even during low-flow periods. To the Minister of Environment and SRD: what reason does the minister have for allowing increased water allocation when the total flow is dropping?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We take water very seriously with regard to the Athabasca River and across this province. In fact, we have a system that's continuously monitoring, and we evaluate within our framework. We have a system of green condition, when you can allow approvals for water to happen; a yellow condition so that oil sands companies will be cautioned when they require water limit withdrawals; and then we have a red condition, that makes sure that less than 1 per cent of allocation would be withdrawn. We work with industry and they work with us to make sure that when there are low flows, we have policies in place to protect that.

Ms Blakeman: No. Didn't answer the question.

Back to the same minister. Given that this minister keeps touting science-based decision-making, why do the recommendations of both the '06 Radke report and the '07 joint review panel for the Kearl project for base water-flow limits get ignored in the new framework? Or were they not science based?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're not ignoring these. We are taking real action on the ground with regard to the monitoring that we're doing in the oil sands with regard to the amount of allocation of water from the river. We are taking action in this province. As we grow the oil sands region, we're increasing the monitoring that's happening there. We have 2 per cent allowable but less than 1 per cent of allocation happening there. Those are real actions.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Well, thanks very much, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the minister for raising that. How does the minister tell the newer oil sands projects that under the current water management framework there will not be enough water for their development? Or to put it another way, why did Syncrude and Suncor get a FITFIR deal to keep drawing as much water as they want?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have a process in this province called cumulative effects management. We make sure that we're monitoring within the whole land-use area. We have enough water, and as I said, during low flows we work together with industry to make sure that we take care of that and that less than 1 per cent of the water withdrawal happens. That is taking real environmental action. We will continue to develop the oil sands in an environmentally responsible way, as we have in the past and will continue in the future.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Student Ministerial Internship Program

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last spring this PC government quietly introduced the taxpayer-funded Alberta student ministerial internship program, better known as the tiny Tory boot camp, for 27 nonpartisan individuals. At the same time this government cut the STEP program, which nonprofit and volunteer organizations relied on to provide programs for families. To the Minister of Human Services: why does this government insist on funding self-serving projects rather than organizations that support families and communities across Alberta?

Mr. Hancock: What an absurd context that he's put around a very important question. The important part of that question was about the STEP program. The absurdity is talking about an internship program which allows young Albertans to come in and understand the workings of government, young Albertans from all political backgrounds, I might add. [interjections] If he wants the proof of that, I can show him that because some of those interns have been very active in other political processes. But that's not the important thing. [interjections] The important thing is that young Albertans have the opportunity to get an internship in government, understand the workings of government, and take that very good . . .

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

The Speaker: Edmonton-Centre, you had your chance. If you want another chance, let's please abide by the rules of decorum here.

Also, while I'm on my feet, I might add that there are a number of side conversations going on over here and a number of them going on over there. Sometimes it's difficult to hear each other think. I know that we might not like questions, the way they're phrased. I know we might not like answers, the way they're given. But the people giving them have the right to give them and to ask them in their own words, so let's give them the respect, shall we? That would be very refreshing.

Are we ready to carry on? Let us proceed, then. The hon. member.

Student Ministerial Internship Program (continued)

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A special STEP program just for Tories.

Given the difficult position that nonprofit and voluntary organizations are in because of this PC government's budget cuts and given that this government chose to fund its own 27 interns, to the same minister: do you find it a little hypocritical to tell organizations across Alberta that you can't afford to pay for their interns while you happily use public dollars to pay for yours?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, again, the hon. member provokes. The response clearly indicates that internships across government, both ministerial interns and departmental interns, are very important ways of ensuring that young people get an opportunity to get experience, and that's a very educational process.

But I would answer the hon. member's question. We have, in fact, very much appreciated the opportunity for other organizations to have internship programs, and that's why my department has partnered with Enterprise and Advanced Education to increase the funding available for SCIP so that Volunteer Alberta can provide internship programs to not-for-profits all across the province.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. SCIP and STEP are two totally different programs, Minister.

Given that cutting programs, which hurts communities, means this government is actually putting Albertan families last and given that the government's priority is itself and not families and communities, when the opposition raised serious concerns about priorities, this minister's response is not to answer questions but to asphyxiate us with large volumes of hot air.

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, perhaps that could be another carbon capture and storage project.

The opportunities for young Albertans to learn about voluntary organizations and understand the career in a voluntary organization is very important to this government. That's why we're working with Volunteer Alberta, and that's why we're working with voluntary organizations across the province, to ensure that that part of the STEP program continues. The STEP program itself was cancelled, yes. It was cancelled because employment opportunities for young Albertans wasn't the priority. There are lots of employment opportunities, but learning how to work in . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, followed by Edmonton-South West.

Agriculture and Rural Development Policy Adviser

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hope to tone down things here a little bit.

Last summer the agriculture minister found himself in a bit of hot water when the media revealed that Evan Berger, the former ag minister, was hired by the ag department to be a senior policy adviser. My questions are to the current agriculture minister. Could he remind us why he decided to hire Mr. Berger, and can he tell us how Mr. Berger has been doing in his role as a policy adviser now that he's held the job for some nine months?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One would have hoped for a question about policy, but we'll address this question. I do wonder, however, if perhaps the question was written by or the hon. member was assisted by one of the failed candidates who is working for his caucus. Nonetheless, the person in question does not report to me. He reports to an assistant deputy minister. That group does great policy work, and I'm very happy with the work that they do.

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our employees don't have a cooling-off period.

Can the minister commit to tabling some of the examples of, I quote, the innovative, leading-edge, written policy advice he has received from Mr. Berger, or has all the advice been oral? If so, can the minister tell us on which topics he gets advice from Mr. Berger?

Mr. Olson: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member's staff also doesn't get preapproved by the Ethics Commissioner, and that's what happened in this particular case. This person was not hired until after the Ethics Commissioner had approved the position.

The evidence of the good work that Mr. Berger is doing as well as my staff is all over the place. It's in the Growing Forward agreement we just entered into with the federal government, a new five-year agreement that we're very proud of, also CEDA negotiations, farm safety, rat policy, and on we go.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Mr. Berger earns about the equivalent of a ministerial salary, can the minister assure us that Albertans are getting good value for money for his continued employment?

Mr. Olson: Mr. Speaker, my understanding is that Mr. Berger earns a salary which is similar to that of an executive manager. I am no more going to be providing particular evidence of one employee of my department, this one in particular, than I am any of the rest of the 1,600. They all do good work, and I'm proud of the work they all do.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister for Edmonton-South West, followed by Medicine Hat.

Missing Persons

Mr. Jeneroux: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. May 5 through May 11 is Missing Persons Week. This important week is a time for us to reflect on what we can do as individuals and as a government to help. As a father of two young daughters I can't even fathom what it would be like if they were to go missing. This week's remarkable rescue in Ohio of three women who had been missing for over a decade renews hope for those that are still missing, like Shelley-Anne Bacsu of Hinton, who has not been seen for over 30 years, and Lyle and Marie McCann, who went missing in 2010. To the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General: what is our government doing to help reunite families and friends with their missing loved ones?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I thank the hon. member for that question, particularly given that this week is, in fact, Missing Persons Week. One of the things that I want to highlight to him is the Amber Alert program, which began in this province in 2002. One of the success stories includes the return to her home of a 16-year-old with fetal alcohol spectrum disorder in Edmonton two years ago. This isn't just the work of legislators, Mr. Speaker. It's also the work of the police services in this province, and we have to give them a sincere thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Jeneroux: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. It's pretty clear that the police agencies do an amazing job when looking for missing people. I don't want to deflect from that, but what role does our government play, specifically the Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. One very important initiative was the enactment last year of the Missing Persons Act, and I thank the former Minister of Justice for passing that particular act. This legislation actually gives police the tools to deal with missing persons matters, gets them information ahead of time while respecting people's privacy. It is the first such stand-alone legislation in the entire country, but it's not going to be the last. I've spoken to Manitoba's Attorney General, who has indicated to me that he has significant interest in this particular area and plans to pass similar legislation.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Jeneroux: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: given that these situations have a reaching range of people they affect, what about the families and friends of missing people? What services does our government provide to help them during and after to cope with this incredibly tough situation?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much again, Mr. Speaker. Victims continue to be a priority for this government, especially with the passage of Bill 16, the Victims Statutes Amendment Act, 2013, which improves services to victims throughout this province. I note that it was actually passed with the support of both sides of the House. Particularly, this year we're also providing \$12.9 million to support the 76 police-based programs that operate

victims' services units across the province. There's still more work to be done, but we've paved some good ground here.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat, followed by Lesser Slave Lake.

Support for the Film Industry

Mr. Pedersen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was very pleased to see this House pass my private member's motion to restore a competitive film tax credit. A competitive film tax credit will bring back a fair, honest system that all Alberta film and television producers can benefit from and eliminate this government's habit of picking winners and losers in the industry. To the Minister of Culture: since this motion has received support from all parties, when can we expect to see your government take action and implement it?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That was indeed a robust debate on that motion. Of course, the motion is advice to the government. The Alberta multimedia development fund is already doing tremendous work in the film, television, and digital media industry. We know there are many solutions to funding out there such as public-private partnerships. We know that the funding model that we have right now with the Alberta multimedia development fund is working.

Mr. Pedersen: To the same minister: given that the current system of film grants has resulted in anti-Alberta projects like *Dirty Oil* receiving tax dollars with the minister's approval, doesn't she see the fairness and opportunity in broad-based relief as opposed to direct subsidies and support from taxpayers for individual projects?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, there are many production companies, and when they apply for films or television, it's not for me to judge the interest and the passion out there that a production company may have. At the end of the day it's about job creation, it's about diversification, and it's about encouraging our students who are at NAIT or at SAIT or at Red Deer College to go into a profession like film, television, or digital media and stay in Alberta and achieve their dreams and work on a crew and be part of something really awesome.

Mr. Pedersen: To the same minister: given that a local president of the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees said that this motion "is a turning point for [the Alberta film] industry as never before have we had such strong support from the legislature," can you give Alberta film and television workers a firm date by which they can expect your government to take action and restore fairness in their industry?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Film Advisory Council currently is doing a lot of excellent work and having conversations with a number of individuals just about the choices out there, whether it's public-private partnerships, whether it's AMDF, or whether it's a tax credit. At the end of the day it's about ensuring that these films are filmed here. This fund is not

about choosing winners or losers. It's about funding the right things that need to be done and encouraging the jobs to stay here in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake, followed by Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Slave Lake Housing Needs

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A number of homes were lost in Lesser Slave Lake during the wildfires we had. Our government made a swift decision to purchase over 400 manufactured homes and ship them to the area for those in need. I understand that the housing authority will no longer be placing people in units as they become vacant even though there is a drastic need for housing in the area. My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Why is it that we can't use those units that are there in Slave Lake for the people of Slave Lake as well as the MD of Lesser Slave River?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The units in question were always intended to be short-term housing to be used in a time of crisis and to help the community transition back to success given that this was one of the greatest disasters the province of Alberta has ever experienced. Now, the community, particularly the Tri-Council, has done an amazing job of helping the community to recover, rebuilding housing because the demand for affordable housing is on the decline. Currently in the province of Alberta we are developing a comprehensive real estate strategy that will recognize the need for temporary units across the province and help us work on a strategy for housing province-wide.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Calahasen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the minister for that answer. However, given the fact that we made such a big deal with the Tri-Council being involved in all decisions regarding the recovery, why are they not being consulted in the decision to remove these units or in the exit strategy or to even be involved so that they can become part of the solution rather than part of the problem?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We've consulted with the Tri-Council from the very beginning. They have done an exceptional job of working together to help rebuild the community. When affordable housing and crisis housing was necessary for the community immediately after the fire, we consulted with the Tri-Council, who helped us work out the strategy for how many houses were needed, how we were going to develop them in the community, and how we were going to transition through this period of rebuilding the community. We'll continue to work with the Tri-Council and the local housing authority to address the needs in the community. We're going to continue to discuss when it comes to these transitional housing units and the province-wide strategy to make sure they're utilized in the best possible way.

Ms Calahasen: To the same minister, then, Mr. Speaker. Given the fact that these trailers . . .

Some Hon. Members: Trailers for sale or rent.

Ms Calahasen: My poor Roger Miller song.

To the same minister: given the fact that these trailers will be moved eventually and that there's such a housing need in a constituency such as mine, why – why – can't you consider providing these units to those authorities or communities who are needing them?

2:40

Mr. Griffiths: Mr. Speaker, we take all of this very seriously. We're aware of the housing needs in Slave Lake. We know that the local housing authority manages those housing needs exceptionally well in working with partnerships throughout the community and throughout the region. There's a need for affordable housing all over this province because we have such a fast-growing economy and so many new people moving here, which is why we're working on a long-term, comprehensive, province-wide strategy to address this. These units as well as other units around the province will be accorded through a province-wide strategy to address every community's needs where possible.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, followed by Calgary-Glenmore.

Electricity Pricing

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government doesn't like to answer questions about electricity. The maximum generation capacity of Alberta is 14,400 megawatts, and the average demand is 8,000 megawatts. Given that there is clearly more supply of electricity than demand, why has the monthly average price for wholesale electricity gone from \$65 to \$93 a megawatt?

Mr. Hughes: Mr. Speaker, there are days when I feel like all I do is answer questions about electricity from this member.

One has to be fair minded about this. You have to look at a series of months. Actually, what ordinary consumers pay is not the wholesale price. Rather, they pay a price which I would observe is considerably lower each month this year than it was last year. It's right in the middle of the pricing of electricity right across this country. It's a fair price.

Mr. Anglin: Let's put this in context here. Given that ratepayers paid to the generators of Alberta on average \$400 million per month for all of last year, how does this minister justify the increase now that Albertans have been paying \$600 million per month to the generators for 2013?

Mr. Hughes: Well, Mr. Speaker, one can cherry-pick and try and pick apples, oranges, or whatever fruit one wishes in terms of trying to compare different numbers, but the facts don't lie. The facts are that we have fair pricing for electricity in Alberta. We have consistent delivery of electricity in Alberta. As the hon. member noted himself in his opening comments, we have tremendous capacity in this province to ensure that Albertans are well served and that when they turn the light switch on, it goes on.

Mr. Anglin: We're not talking about apples and oranges; we're talking about electricity.

Given that Alberta ratepayers will pay the generators \$850 million for selling this electricity for the month of April and given that Albertans are on track to pay the generators \$1.9 billion for the month of May, would another minister like to pinch-hit and tell Albertans how wonderful this electricity market is working for Albertans?

Mr. Hughes: Mr. Speaker, it's easy to pick numbers out of the air and try and turn them into facts. Actually, if you look at the history, if you look at the performance – and I'd be happy to share this information subsequently – if you look at the rates that Albertans pay, they are fair. They're in the middle of the pack in terms of the rates that other Canadians pay if you look at comparable jurisdictions.

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

Statements by the Speaker

Timers in Question Period Use of Another Member's Letterhead

The Speaker: Just two quick notices here before we go on and continue with the introduction of guests, even if it's just for the record at this stage. One, the Speaker did not hear the real bell when it apparently went off right when I stood to recognize the last questioner primarily because of an increased level of noise in the Assembly. However, I did hear a subsequent bell at 2:42. I believe it came from the northwest corner. This has happened all too frequently. If someone has a bell that rings to signal their particular version of when question period ends, I'd ask you to please silence it because it is distracting.

The other point is that this is a very busy Chamber even when we're not sitting in it, hon. members. While most of you are here and paying rapt attention, let me say this. We get a number of groups who come and visit. They tour through the Assembly. They walk through the Assembly. We have MLA for a Day, where every single seat is taken up by a student, for example. These students move around. They have their own materials. And it is very possible sometimes during Committee of the Whole that members go and sit in each other's desks.

As a result of that, I'm thinking someone may have inadvertently picked up another person's letterhead and perhaps mistakenly used it as their own. Or not. Nonetheless, it has come to the Speaker's attention that there has been a little bit of a note exchange going on, perhaps attributed to those whose name is on the letterhead but not necessarily to those who signed the notes. If that happened directly, inadvertently, or in a joking fashion or whatever, I would ask you to please stop that because it has offended some members, and I've received notes to that effect. They're not in on the joke the way some of you are.

That having been said, let us continue on.

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

The Speaker: I will recognize Edmonton-Ellerslie for your introduction.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour and a privilege to rise today and introduce to you and through you an outstanding individual, Mr. Khan Virk. He has been a very active volunteer in the community for many, many years. He was heavily involved with soccer in the city of Edmonton, serving on the board of EDSA, and is currently involved with the Mini World Cup. He has also been a very active member of the Millwoods Cultural Society of Retired and Semi Retired as their vice-president. I've known Mr. Virk ever since we came to Canada, and he's always been Uncle Virk to me. He's joined here today by his grandson Rocky. At this time I'd ask both

of my guests to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you.

We have the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, followed by the Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is Canada's largest beef-producing province, and the beef industry is a cornerstone of our agricultural industry and our agricultural economy. The Alberta Beef Producers are a strong voice for that industry, for their members, and they're an important partner with us in maintaining sustainability and competitiveness for our beef industry. We have with us today four representatives of the Alberta Beef Producers: the chair, Doug Sawyer; the vice-chair, Greg Bowie; the finance chair, John Buckley; and their executive director, Rich Smith. They've been watching these proceedings for the last hour or so. They're standing now in the members' gallery. I'd ask that hon. members welcome them.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services, followed by St. Albert.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today it's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly one of my constituents in Edmonton-Whitemud, Alice Ayre. This is Alice's first time in the House, and she's indicated that she wanted to come and see the procedures and how business is conducted. She's seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask that Alice rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Khan: Mr. Speaker, I'm honoured to rise and introduce to you and through you a fine young man from Norrköping, Sweden. Karl Waszkiewicz is with the almost 60 fine kids from the Rotary International group that's visiting us today. Karl has almost spent a full year in St. Albert. He's attending high school at Bellerose. I have it on good authority, as he's living with his rotary family, Rob and Cathy Heron, who are very good friends of mine, that Karl is an outstanding young man, they assure me, and he is setting a very good example for their young children. I'd like to ask my colleagues in the House to recognize a fine young man with their warm traditional greeting.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour today to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a lady who I have the utmost respect for. My first opportunity to get to know her was when she was the mayor of Lacombe. I had the tremendous opportunity of learning from her when I sat on Lacombe's Economic Development Board. She has had an incredible impact on our community both as mayor and MLA. Mrs. Judy Gordon, thank you for all you have done for Alberta and for our community. I'd ask that Mrs. Gordon please receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

2:50

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very happy today to have guests again in the gallery, this time for the second reading of the Children First Act. These individuals have played a vital partnership role with government in the past and will be engaged

throughout the next year, as will all Albertans, as we look forward to focus on the children's agenda.

With us today are members of the Alberta Foster Parent Association: Sylvia Thompson, Linda Krauskopf, Katherine Jones, and Norm Brownell. I'd ask them to stand, please, as I call their names. We also have Carolyn Goard, the acting executive director of the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters; and Christie Lavan, also with the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters; Sergeant Gary Willits, the child at risk response team, Edmonton Police Service; Deb Cautley from the Youth Empowerment & Support Services society; Val Campbell, chair of the death review committee working group and a Crown prosecutor. From the Alberta Centre for Child, Family and Community Research: Leslie Twilley; Christine Werk, who is also a constituent in Edmonton-Whitemud; Cecilia Bukutu; Jo Lamba; and Robyn Blackadar.

Again, today we have with us Marie Whelan, who, as I mentioned yesterday, was the principal at St. Mary and now at Monsignor Fee Otterson and is the inspiration for me behind the Children First Act. With Marie today is her daughter Karen Keats, who also is an educator with the Edmonton public system, I believe. I'd ask them all to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome and a thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 54 enthusiastic, intelligent, awesome Rotary youth exchange students who are living in Alberta for one year. The students come from Asia, Europe, South America, and all parts of Canada. Canadian students are preparing for their exchange next year. I had the pleasure of speaking with them this morning, but I'm sure the highlight for them was meeting the Premier. I'm pleased to welcome the students along with their Rotarians: Phil Hochhausen, Wayne McCutcheon, Ron Prokosch, Rick Istead, Donna Johnson, and Doug Campbell. They are seated in the public gallery, and I'd ask that they please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Assisted Living Facilities in Brooks

Mr. Hale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Seated in the gallery today are a group of brave individuals who travelled all the way up from Brooks to get this government's attention on an issue that is near and dear to their hearts. They are here to talk about the quality of care their loved ones, patients, are receiving while living in facilities that are supposed to be regulated and supervised by the government.

They shared their stories with the media earlier today, and they are truly heartbreaking to hear. I won't go into too much detail, Mr. Speaker, but here is a sampling. A lady told us about the care in the same facilities in 2011. She said that her mother was hospitalized after she had fallen in a hallway. The staff did not call for an ambulance but, instead, waited until the next day when her mother could not get out of bed. She suffered a cracked kneecap and torn ligaments as well as facial bruising. She was hospitalized for six weeks. She now requires a walker, something she didn't require prior to her fall. Why do these kinds of things happen without the minister intervening and holding anyone responsible?

This is just one story of dozens that have transpired in these facilities.

Even staff at the facilities have been afraid to speak out for fear of reprisal. Some have been terminated for voicing their concerns, and others can't take it anymore. That's why they're here. Their concerns and stories have been made known to the government through the proper channels, through contact with elected officials, and even through official complaints under the Protection for Persons in Care Act dating back to 2011. They are not getting anywhere. They are not here to point fingers, Mr. Speaker. They're here for answers. They're here to demand action. They're here because they have nowhere else left to go.

This government is tasked with ensuring basic standards for quality of care and is failing these people that they love. I applaud their courage, and I'm proud to stand with them in demanding answers and actions. We will be at your office shortly, Mr. Health Minister, to give you another formal complaint and to get your assurance that you will investigate the employees who were terminated, who brought their concerns forward, and assure the employees who are here that they will not be terminated for speaking out.

The Speaker: Hon. member, thank you.

Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by Edmonton-South West.

Support for Municipalities

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Municipalities provide Albertans with the important day-to-day services we all rely on – transit, roads, sidewalks, snow removal, libraries, water, sewage, and garbage disposal – yet they receive the least amount of funding of the three orders of government. In fact, municipalities only receive 10 per cent of the tax dollar but provide 90 per cent of the services. This creates an unfair relationship of dependency and saps municipal autonomy. Municipalities need local revenues to fund local priorities.

Mr. Speaker, the mayors of Edmonton and Calgary have been calling for a city charter which would give them the tools and resources to deliver services, programs, and infrastructure. Clearly, the Minister of Municipal Affairs does not realize most Albertans call Calgary or Edmonton their home, nor does he appreciate the fact that Edmonton has 10 times the population of the third-largest city in Alberta. Many people who do not live within the municipal boundaries of the two largest cities still rely on Edmonton and Calgary for core services, and no matter where Albertans live, they must come to these two cities to receive specialized services. Calgary and Edmonton are asking to be recognized as distinct, distinct in their size and in the way they contribute to Alberta culturally, socially, and economically.

The minister wants a civic charter to apply to more than just the two largest cities. He wants it to apply to all municipalities, but he's missing the point. The purpose of a big-city charter is to recognize the unique role big cities play. Despite how the minister may feel, every municipality is not the same. A summer village is not the same as a city of 1 million people. Mr. Speaker, it's time to treat Edmonton and Calgary as world-class cities and give them the authority, ability, and autonomy to meet the growing needs of their communities.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-South West, followed by Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Education Week

Mr. Jeneroux: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This week marks Education Week in Alberta, and it gives me great pleasure to rise today and celebrate Alberta's education system, which many feel is one of the best in the English-speaking world. But even with those ringing endorsements, we are working hard to make our education system even better so that we can be certain our schools are preparing students for tomorrow.

When our government worked with Albertans to develop Inspiring Education, they told us that our education system must be flexible, innovative, and focused on the student, and they told us that we should encourage engaged thinkers and ethical citizens with an entrepreneurial spirit. We listened, Mr. Speaker, and we are taking action to bring Inspiring Education to life.

One initiative that I would like to highlight today is the high school flexibility enhancement project. Since the 2008-2009 school year the Ministry of Education has been working collaboratively with the principals and superintendents of 16 high schools to study the 25-hour-per-credit requirement and the effect of its removal on high school organization and program delivery. This morning, Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Education announced an expansion of this project, which will give all high schools in Alberta the opportunity to participate. This will increase opportunities for high school students to learn any time, any place, and at any pace. After all, the students must remain our focus, and they are the heart of our efforts in Inspiring Education.

I look forward to continuing to see the ways that Inspiring Education is coming to life in my constituency, Mr. Speaker. I would like to wish everyone a happy Education Week.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader has caught my attention because it is coming up to 3 o'clock.

Mr. Campbell: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that we forgo 7(7) for the time being and finish the business in front of us before we go to Orders of the Day.

The Speaker: Hon. members, unanimous consent is required and requested. Does anyone object to us granting unanimous approval to continue on with the Routine until finished? If you object, please say so now.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: Let us continue on. The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, followed by Sherwood Park.

Continuing Care Facilities

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Associate Minister of Seniors and I along with mayors and reeves in my constituency announced the opening of the new Points West Living in my constituency. Every Albertan regardless of age or circumstances should have a place they are proud to call home. But welcoming spaces like this don't just happen. They are built, supported, and maintained by committed staff, loving families, visionary leaders, and an engaged community. All of those have certainly come together at Points West Living. Here the residents are able to receive the care and the support they need and continue thriving in the community. The Alberta government is proud to be a partner in this facility.

3:00

This new supportive living centre will add 42 new designated supportive living spaces in Cold Lake. An additional 10 spaces will be independent living spaces. The facility will provide new, modern, homelike accommodations and expanded supportive living options. We are pleased to provide \$3.7 million to the affordable supportive living initiative to support this project.

We remain committed to increasing the supply of affordable supportive living spaces for Alberta's seniors and vulnerable people. Within the past two years alone we partnered with voluntary and private providers to open more than 2,100 continuing care spaces province-wide. These spaces allow more seniors to get the care they need closer to home while staying connected to their families, friends, and communities. This is a priority for Albertans and is a priority for our government.

Congratulations on the opening of Points West in Cold Lake.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Bitumen Royalty in Kind Review

Ms Olesen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I would like to commend the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future for their review of the BRIK program and, of course, our chairman, the Member for Calgary-East. I think the review shed needed light on the importance of upgrading, refining, the capture of value-added in Alberta, and the benefits of further processing in Alberta in so many ways.

As the chairman of North West Upgrading pointed out, Alberta would have made \$500 million more in 2012 had their BRIK allocation program been up and running. Other benefits include improving the market for bitumen, taking supply off the market, improving prices for western Canada select, and nailing market share for improved Alberta production before the markets are dominated by other players.

The review overturned some of the myths about the profitability and impact of processing in Alberta. It also improved the understanding of members of the committee and hopefully this entire House on a number of current issues relating to our oil and gas industry moving forward.

It also pointed out how the regulatory approvals need to be streamlined, which supports our implementation of a new single regulator as per the Responsible Energy Development Act.

The report identifies some areas where further research may be required such as the capacity of our watershed to deliver the quantities of processed water.

The North West Upgrader project alone quantified some of the benefits: 1,300 engineers and accountants currently working on the design; 8,000 construction jobs; 350 specialists; a \$4.6 billion impact to the Albertan economy in the construction phase, generating over \$400 million in provincial taxes and over \$900 million in federal tax.

Value-added processing is about capturing the potential of Alberta's resources for Albertans and growing our economy so we can provide the high-quality services and supports Albertans deserve.

Congratulations to the committee, and thank you so much to all staff and presenters for your valuable insights.

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

Calgary Access Awareness Week

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize Access Awareness Week, a valiant effort by many people to raise awareness of people living with a disability and the barriers and challenges they face. Calgary Access Awareness Week promotes a barrier-free society for all citizens of Calgary, whether that is transportation, employment, recreation, education, or communication.

Today I had the privilege of being selected along with Joy Bowen-Eyre, a Calgary board of education trustee, and Calgary alderman Diane Colley-Urquhart to become image-makers for the day by simulating living with a disability.

It is said that to truly understand someone, one should take a walk in their shoes. Well, today, Mr. Speaker, I wheeled in someone's chair. It was quite an eye-opener, and I have a much better understanding of the unique situations people with disabilities face as well as the things that I often took for granted. It gives me an entirely new level of respect for the Member for Calgary-Buffalo and the challenges he must overcome daily in simply navigating the Legislature Grounds. Whether it be a long wait for an accessible vehicle this morning to be transported here to the Legislature, the fact that I needed someone to carry my coffee, open a drawer, open a door, or even move items in my office just to allow me access to my desk, it has been an enlightening experience to say the least.

Since becoming elected, as the Official Opposition Human Services critic I have had the privilege of meeting with many people who share the values of the week of awareness, and we are working together to create a world where people are not seen for what they cannot do but, rather, for what they can contribute.

Access Awareness Week has been successful in accomplishing its statement of purpose, in particular working towards providing a means by which the disabled community can speak for itself and have a voice of its own.

I would like to recognize all the volunteers, organizers, and participants involved in this year's Access Awareness Week. Alberta is a more inclusive, welcoming place because of your contributions, and I thank you for all that you do.

Thank you.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Aboriginal Relations.

Bill 22

Aboriginal Consultation Levy Act

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 22, the Aboriginal Consultation Levy Act. This being a money bill, His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta has a commitment to consult with aboriginal people when land management and resource development decisions may adversely impact their existing treaty or other constitutional rights. Bill 22 is enabling legislation that fully respects First Nations treaty rights and provides First Nations people an opportunity to be more engaged in the consultation process for their benefit and for the benefit of all Albertans.

First Nations and industry have indicated that there is a lack of funding and capacity for some First Nations to do a proper job on consultation. Bill 22 will ensure that the proper funding is in place to build capacity so First Nations can be fully engaged in the

consultation process. Bill 22 will ensure that the consultation is open and transparent for the benefit of all parties. Overall, this bill would help us to make significant steps forward in Alberta's management of the consultation process and in our duty to consult with First Nations people.

[Motion carried; Bill 22 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today. First of all, I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of a petition which calls on the PC government to protect the rights of injured workers by amending the Workers' Compensation Act. I am tabling 52 signatures today.

The second tabling is a letter to the Premier sent from the president of the Alberta College of Social Workers, raising their organization's opposition to the substantial cuts to the persons with developmental disabilities community access program. The letter points out that in the government's own social policy framework "the principle of inclusion is identified as a fundamental belief of both the government and Albertans." However, cutting the program, which promotes community access and social inclusion for persons with developmental disabilities, is very much contrary to this principle. The concerns voiced in this letter show that this government can't be trusted to protect Alberta's most vulnerable citizens.

The final tabling, Mr. Speaker, relates to documents referred to by the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood in his question today, and it includes the appropriate number of copies of a list of the member organizations of the Energy Policy Institute of Canada, the organization for which the new chair of REDA, Mr. Protti, is now a lobbyist. It's quite interesting. He was such a good lobbyist that he was actually given the job of overseeing energy development and environmental road bumps in the province. He did a brilliant job for energy. Unfortunately, the minister has failed in an epic way on behalf of the people of all Alberta.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Two tablings today. The first is an e-mail from one of my constituents, Mark Heseltine, who is writing with great passion about the cuts to the 50-year-old music enrichment program. He just feels that if there was something wrong with the program, it would've failed, you know, before, but it's managed to get through 50 years. It is one with an important history, and it does build a civil and richer society.

The second tabling I have is a report created by the Edmonton-Centre constituency office. We have received a number of letters supporting the music enrichment program and asking that it be restored. Rather than tabling all of the letters, I have just produced a report for you with the text of the letter and the names of everyone we've received so far.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

3:10

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to table the requisite number of copies of a letter I've written to the Member for Calgary-Shaw in response to Question 38, which was accepted as amended in the House a few days ago. Attached to the

letter is the table of that data which he requested. At the same time, the Member for Edmonton-Centre had indicated that there was other information that she would like to have associated to it, and I assume that she will get in touch with my office in written form so I can know precisely what that information is.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have five copies of a letter from Carolyn Pogue of Calgary, who heads up the child well-being initiative, in response to the minister's new Bill 25, asking the question: what does it actually mean to put children first when 91,000 children, twice the number five years ago, are in poverty, teachers are giving their lunches to children obviously in need, and Inn from the Cold housed last week at their church 23 homeless guests, of which 14 were children?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General I have two tablings. The first tabling today is a book authored by Sherri-Lee James and Susan M. Rowe titled *For the Love of My Boys: A Mother's Story of Parent Alienation and Abuse*. Victimization occurs far too often through physical abuse, mental abuse, spousal abuse, and many other ways. It's important that we recognize how destructive abuse can be, not just to victims but society as a whole. I have the appropriate number of copies here to table.

My second tabling on behalf of the minister is the Alberta Justice and Solicitor General victims' services status report, 2011-12. This report indicates that a total of \$13,055,413 was provided to eligible victims of crime by the financial benefits program during this period, and I have the appropriate number of copies to table.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. McAllister: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the appropriate number of copies of a letter that I read last night during debate on Bill 24. I'd like to table those today. It is from one of my constituents, who is a director on the condominium board of Prince of Peace Village near Chestermere. I have brought those today.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Let us move on. We have three points of order. The first one was raised at approximately 2:02 or 2:03 by the Government House Leader.

If you would like to proceed with your point of order, we would welcome it.

Mr. Hancock: I'd withdraw it, Mr. Speaker. There were so many objectionable things that happened today, I can't remember which one I raised the point of order on.

The Speaker: If I read you correctly, Government House Leader, you are withdrawing your point of order. Thank you. I see a nod, so that first point of order is cancelled.

The second point of order was raised at approximately 2:19:30 by the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Do you wish to proceed with your point of order?

Point of Order Anticipation

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll be very brief, and perhaps, you know, this is just an opportunity to clarify it. I rise under 23(e), which is the provision that states that it is not proper to anticipate "contrary to good parliamentary practice, any matter already on the Order Paper or on notice for consideration on that day."

There was a question that referred to subject matter which pertains to Bill 25, which, if you look at the Order Paper, is slated to be discussed today in second reading. I don't want to belabour the point, but it might be an opportunity for clarification.

Thanks.

The Speaker: Anyone from the government side?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Well, I think I'm the next point of order.

The Speaker: Yes, you are.

Ms Blakeman: So perhaps rather than having a whole other point of order, I'll just support my colleague here with the citation on anticipation. It's something that I've been increasingly noticing happen, and in my day I was taught not to do that, so I rose to point out that anticipation was happening here. That appears under our Standing Order 23(e). Now, if we have it in our rules, that's the first rule that we follow. If we don't have it and it's silent, then we tend to move up to *Beauchesne's*, in which we find anticipation rules under 512 to 514, or even up to *Erskine May*, pages 327 and 334 to 335, all of them commenting on the same thing. If there is going to be something on the Order Paper, we should not be using question period because there is another opportunity to raise it.

I in fact checked the Order Paper, and indeed on the back page, page 4, right there under Wednesday, May 8: afternoon, Government Bills and Orders, second reading, Bill 25. Then I thought: well, you know, these get out of date really quickly if we move a bit faster. So I pulled the instructions that I received on the proposed order of business for Wednesday, May 8, subject to progress and as per the Order Paper, that is received from the director of legislative affairs, I'm guessing, and indeed: Wednesday, May 8, afternoon, second reading, Bill 25, the Children First Act, moved by the minister for children's services.

Indeed, I know that every member of the government caucus is provided with what they call the blue sheets or whatever, that outline for them exactly what bills are expected to be brought up by the government that day. So the member for Calgary-Cross was more than aware, in the point of order that I was raising, that that was going to be on the Order Paper and, I'm sure, given her seniority in this House, understood the concept of anticipation, that we were going to be discussing it in the afternoon given that the government has clearly got it marked everywhere to be discussed.

If I could just get a bit more comprehension about the concept of anticipation and not have government members using their precious time to raise issues that are, in fact, scheduled to be on the Order Paper later that day, that would be a wonderful thing, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, it's interesting because usually this is the point of order that I would be raising on the opposition when they bring up questions relative to a budget that's going to be discussed in estimates later that day, the difference, of course, being that usually when they're raising the issues with respect to budget, they're asking about specific numbers and those sorts of things, which are actually the purview of the questions that should be coming up in estimates.

Now, in today's question the hon. Member for Calgary-Cross was not actually asking things that were directly related to the establishment of a review committee in the bill. The bill actually provides for the establishment – and we'll be debating that later on today, hopefully – of the death review committee. It sets up the purpose of the committee, and it sets up the establishment of the committee and the role of the committee and the mandate and all those sorts of good things. What it doesn't talk about is dating violence, which was the interest that was raised by the hon. member. What it doesn't raise in the bill is the impact on children. Of course, it talks about family violence and intimate partner violence. Well, actually it doesn't reference intimate partner violence, but I referenced that in my speech yesterday.

The hon. member had the opportunity to raise a question and wanted to know about the impact not of what is being established here for the purpose and mandate that's in there but how it might relate to other aspects that are not part of the bill: how children might be affected and how it might be utilized in that area and the area of dating violence, which is a very important topic for Albertans today. Questions that come close – just because the family violence death review committee is in the bill that's being discussed today, it doesn't anticipate. It's a different part of the policy discussion, which the hon. member is certainly entitled to ask.

The Speaker: Are there others?

I, too, will be mercifully brief on this, I hope. Standing Order 23(e) is certainly very clear about the definition of anticipation. It says that a member will be called to order if that member "anticipates, contrary to good parliamentary practice, any matter already on the Order Paper or on notice for consideration on that day." Then, of course, it leaves it up to the interpretation, usually, of the Speaker to determine whether or not anticipation has occurred.

3:20

I have the benefit of the Blues as they were. I note that in the first question the hon. Member for Calgary-Cross talked about family violence, about orphans, about a proposed family violence death review committee, homicides, and suicides. The minister responded with comments pertaining to family violence and family violence prevention and aggressors and so on.

In the second question the Member for Calgary-Cross talked about tragedies and partner relationships failing and something to do with dating violence. The minister responded with his sadness at the increasing number of violent incidents, and the debate goes on, talking about bullying and so on.

Then when we get to the final question, we have the Member for Calgary-Cross asking a legitimate question about a strong group of people in the community who are already working hard to prevent family violence, and she tossed a question to the minister as follows: "How is the death review committee going to work with the communities without overlapping their efforts?" Now, up until that point there was no reference whatsoever to anything that's on the Order Paper that I'm aware of although I have to confess that I have not yet had a chance to read thoroughly

the Children First Act, which was tabled yesterday. It's 70 pages long, and I'll be reading it, I guess, tonight. But I didn't see anything out of the ordinary there.

I have cautioned individuals in the House before about anticipation, particularly when we were talking about budget estimates. When departments were up for review for a three-, four-, five-, six-hour period, it would be inappropriate to ask money questions about a department whose estimates were up that evening. I did note that in earlier sessions, which some of us were here for, in 1998, which is one example, Speaker Kowalski, my predecessor, at the time gave quite a speech about this. I'll just read you a couple of sentences from that because it's still what guides me and the Clerk and his table around this matter of anticipation. Here's what Mr. Kowalski said on March 3, 1998, regarding anticipation:

I've indicated time and time again in this House that this chair will provide a wider rather than a narrower interpretation in dealing with subject matters. This chair will give the greatest degree of flexibility to private members when they choose to rise in this particular Assembly. In this case, if the questions would have been of a debating nature and we would have got into a debate on the bill, then the chair would have risen and said that this precludes the opportunity we have in question period. However, in this case, the questions that were directed were framed with words such as: is it government policy? That, in the chair's subjective view, took it out of the realm of debate on a particular bill.

I think, Government House Leader, you raised an interesting point. Typically it would be someone from government raising this matter of anticipation, usually as a reminder to others, but that was not the case today. Two members rose almost simultaneously, Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, followed by Edmonton-Centre. They do raise a good point because, at the end of it all, the third question, that I've already talked about, that was asked by Calgary-Cross was responded to by the Government House Leader in the following manner:

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The family violence death review committee is something that the community and the stakeholders in this area have been asking for for a number of years. We've been working with the community in terms of developing a proposal for a family violence death review committee. If Bill 25 is passed by the Legislature, the community I believe will be very strongly supportive of us implementing what they've asked for.

It was at that point that the two points of order had been raised because some specific reference to a bill that's on the Order Paper was noted.

Nonetheless, I don't see anything having been violated here, and we're going to move on with that clarification.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 25

Children First Act

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed an honour and a privilege to rise again today, this time to move second reading of Bill 25, the Children First Act.

In doing so, I again would like to acknowledge and thank our Premier for the emphasis that she's placed on early childhood development, early learning, the protection of children, and the

opportunity for each and every child in Alberta to have the opportunity for success, the opportunity to reach potential, the opportunity to aspire to be the best that they can be. I'd like to thank my constituents and the Premier for entrusting me with a leadership role in helping to make that happen for Alberta's children.

I'd also like to acknowledge and thank Marie Whelan and Margo McGee. Marie is with us here today with her daughter Karen, as I introduced. Margo, unfortunately, couldn't be here. They gave me this Children First pin on the day that I was sworn in as Minister of Education in March 2008, a pin that I've worn every day since then as a constant reminder of where our priorities as individuals and as government should lie.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

At meetings people often ask what the pin is about. "Is it an organization or a program?" I'm pleased to respond: "No. It's our agenda. It's what we're about." Marie and Margo have been inspirations as models of loving and caring for children, whatever those children's gifts or attributes might be. It's fitting, then, that this pin and this act that I am moving share the name "Children First" in honour of Marie and Margo and the work that they do and that so many others in our community do to put children first and to make sure that children have the opportunity for success.

There is nothing more precious than a child, and that's why the well-being, safety, security, education, and health of our children are priorities for our Premier and our government. Those priorities are shared by many stakeholders and service delivery partners who've identified opportunities for enhancing the tools, processes, policies, and laws relating to the success of children. Their input is reflected in this act although I must say that this act is not complete. There is much more work to be done.

Two hundred and ten years ago William Wordsworth wrote these words: the child is the father of the man. He was right. In the intervening 22 decades evidence-based research has clearly shown that what we do with, for, and to our children will in great measure determine how they grow up and who they grow up to be as adults. That's why the Children First Act is so important.

The primary responsibility for the raising of children and the right to determine what's best for a child rests with parents. We know that the great majority of children in Alberta live in safe and caring environments, but even the strongest and the most caring of families will sometimes face crisis and challenge and will need help. One of the objectives of this act is to ensure that that help is there when and how it is needed to strengthen families and to protect children.

Unfortunately, not all children in Alberta are safe or cared for properly. Many live in situations of neglect or danger. When a child has been subject to or is at risk of serious harm or injury, time is of the essence. The people who are there to help a child need to work together to provide those wraparound services which understand the challenges of the family and the needs of the child and provide support and understanding.

The Children First Act has a preamble that sets the context, the values, and then provides four essential elements to give action to those values. The first calls for the creation of a children's charter that can be used to establish the principles, priorities, and roles and responsibilities pursuant to which individuals, families, communities, and governments engage and collaborate to ensure that each Albertan child and family has the opportunity to succeed.

The charter will be a living document that will continue to develop as we learn more about what our children need, when they need it, and have more evidence-based research to guide our decisions and direction. It will function as a lens through which programs, policies, and approaches can be evaluated before they are put in place and reviewed to ensure that they are achieving results. It will help to ensure that those who want what is best for our children are not working at crosspurposes and that what is done to solve a problem in one area doesn't create a problem in another area.

The second piece calls for a complete review of policies, programs, and services affecting children and reporting to the Legislature on that review. Child poverty will not be overcome without comprehensive action and focused effort and resources. While many great programs are working for children and families now, we need to ensure that we are deliberate and single-minded in our purpose. That means effective, comprehensive, coordinated, community-owned action guided by laws and policies which are purposely designed to achieve successful outcomes, not merely deal with the symptoms, as important as that work is.

The third provides a mandate for sharing information between parents and active partners in law enforcement, education, health, children's services, and service providers collaborating for the success of the child when dealing with the health, safety, education, or well-being of a child. Additional amendments to the FOIP Act and the Health Information Act will make it clear that a child does not have to be in imminent danger before information can be shared, changing the test to a risk of harm to the health and safety of the child. These provisions will undergo further scrutiny as those acts are reviewed and as we do the comprehensive review of laws relating to children. But we cannot ask police, educators, health professionals, and social workers to collaborate for kids' sake without providing a safe platform for them to share among themselves the necessary information to truly act in the best interests of the success of the child and the family.

3:30

We had with us yesterday Chief Hanson from Calgary, who has been a strong advocate for information sharing, and so many others have let us know over the years that one of the single greatest barriers to success in helping children is the inability of people working in the area to collaborate and share information. It's not that that's prohibited by the acts now, but we've created this climate of defaulting to no, and that's unnecessary and unreasonable.

The fourth key area under this act provides the Alberta Centre for Child, Family and Community Research and the provincial Child and Youth Data Lab with greater access to information. This will enhance their work in analyzing crossprogram trends and make recommendations for improvement. Evidence-based decision-making and longitudinal analysis are extremely important to ensure that government and its partners have the information needed to make the right decisions and to adapt in an informed and meaningful way to change. Good data drives good decisions.

With these four key elements in place the act goes on to deal with some specific changes that our partners advised us on as we consulted about the children's agenda. These specific changes are the beginning, the work that could be accomplished immediately as we embark on the wholesale review through the provisions of this act and the learnings from the results-based budgeting project. The government of Alberta's approach to results-based budgeting will also help to ensure that programs that are designed to help in

the positive development of our children actually produce the outcomes that we expect of them.

The Children First Act calls for changes to the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act that will enable qualified, front-line workers to make timely decisions about the children they serve. We ask our staff to use their skills and judgment to help children and families, but then require them to adhere to policies and processes that tie their hands. Well, Mr. Speaker, rules are for when brains run out. We want our staff to be guided by experience, intellect, and the best practice but to put into effect their best efforts to help families achieve successful outcomes.

Consultation on this act revealed that current processes and policies have often prevented a timely or effective response. The provisions of this act will ensure that all who are mandated to act in the best interests of children will have comprehensive, timely, accurate, and valuable information with which to make their decisions.

The changes will also acknowledge the important role of foster parents and kinship care. We have some members of the Alberta Foster Parent Association with us today. We ask Albertans to take children into their families and homes and care for them as their own children, but we stop short of giving them the ability to do just that. In result, too often children in foster care see themselves as an extra, not as part of the family. We want to change that. We want foster parents and kinship parents to act as parents with as much authority as can be appropriately given.

After a year of independent operation as an officer of the Legislature the Child and Youth Advocate has requested changes to his act to further support his mandate. The Child and Youth Advocate Act will be amended at his request to enable the advocate to investigate serious injury or death of a young adult receiving post-18 care and maintenance. A second amendment will allow the advocate to provide information to an appeal panel on behalf of a child.

The government of Alberta believes that raising a child successfully requires a stable family, a caring and engaged community, and the enabling partnership of government. Family violence is one of the great challenges we face in creating a solid foundation for some of Alberta's children. The effect of family violence goes far beyond the family. Those children who experience family violence or who grow up in dysfunctional families are less likely to finish school, more likely to have addictions or other medical problems, less likely to be successful, more likely to end up living on the margins of society.

In many ways we also become what we behold. It's a sad fact that those who grow up in violent families often go on to replicate that violence in their own families. None of us can choose the families that we're born into; however, we can choose the types of families our children are born into if we have the right kind of help. The early intervention and supports that this act is meant to facilitate will help to break the cycle of family violence and help to create a better future both for the children in those families and the children of those children.

This act will amend several other statutes to provide more timely recalculation of support orders under the maintenance enforcement program and the payment recalculation program; to improve the offence provisions of the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act, the Drug-endangered Children Act, and the Protection of Sexually Exploited Children Act by removing the term "wilfully" to ensure that those who put children at risk are held accountable regardless of intent or motivation; to allow children under 12 the ability to appeal court orders under the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act and guardians to appeal permanent guardianship orders; to allow applications to be

made to the victims of crime fund under the victims restitution act for the funding of counselling services for children who have been sexually exploited or otherwise made the victim of physical or mental harm due to crime.

Amendments will be made to the Protection Against Family Violence Act in two important areas. Family violence protection orders issued in other jurisdictions will be enforceable in Alberta to reduce risk, additional costs, and court appearances for those seeking similar protections that they had elsewhere in Canada and other reciprocal jurisdictions. Mr. Speaker, it means that the police will be able to rely on those family protection orders and help protect partners and children. A family violence death review committee will be established to review all family violence related deaths. The goal will be to identify trends, patterns, risk factors, and gaps in service to make recommendations for systemic change.

Mr. Speaker, death in the situation of family violence, intimate partner violence is a real tragedy, a tragedy for the families, a tragedy for kids that may be left behind, a tragedy for parents and others. But we compound that tragedy if we don't learn from it and understand how we could do better as a community, as a society to protect others from a similar fate.

The Children First Act acknowledges that children are the future of this province and that supporting children in becoming successful adults benefits society as a whole. The government of Alberta recognizes that children are the foundation for Alberta's future. That's why we have Alberta's Promise, dedicated to improving the lives of Alberta's children and youth. It does so by inspiring ideas, actions, and investment between our business, agency, and community partners to help build a brighter future for Alberta's children. Alberta's Promise brings together people, businesses, and not-for-profit organizations passionate about helping kids, and when we do, we keep our promise to Alberta's children and youth. I'm pleased to say that in this act Alberta's Promise will be extended for a further five years.

Mr. Speaker, a committed, cohesive, and caring society is one that puts children first. Through this act Alberta builds on our social policy framework by focusing on children first. Through it we show that our Premier and our government are committed to Alberta's children and that there truly is nothing more precious than a child. Because of this act I will be able to continue to wear my Children First pin proudly and continue to say that children first is our agenda. Alberta's children are Alberta's future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

I recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour and privilege for me to stand up and speak to Bill 25, the Children First Act, as the former children's services minister when I was with the government. Before I make any comments on the bill, I want to start off by first acknowledging the unbelievable staff that the minister has in his department. I've just started to read the bill, and if I may, I want to make a comment. You can see the footprint on this bill of every staff that I had the honour and privilege of working previously with when I was the minister.

I want to just make a comment on the minister that's bringing the bill forward because he and I go back a long way. I absolutely want to acknowledge his passion when it comes to protecting children in this province. I could probably go on and on about the fights that we used to have when he was the Justice minister and I was the Solicitor General, all the fights that we used to pick when the Liberal government was there at our federal-provincial-

territorial meetings, and the passion that we both brought forward in regard to representing the province and not only representing our province but representing the children of this particular province.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, it's exciting to see this bill hit this Legislature floor. It has some 76 pages that I think need to be read through. I know that the minister will be more than willing to answer any questions that we have on this particular piece of legislation. I know in my heart the people that work in that department – and, quite frankly, I'm not afraid to say about the minister, knowing him, that in his heart he will be wearing his pin very proudly when he says “children first” because that's the type of person that he is.

3:40

There are things in this bill that I really like. What was nice to see and refreshing to see in this Bill 25, the Children First Act, is the preamble. The minister alluded to the preamble, and quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, this is the first government bill that I have seen in I don't know how long among bills that the government has tabled in the Legislature lately that has gone back to the preamble. I think preambles are important, especially in pieces of legislation that are affecting people's lives and children's lives on a daily basis.

The minister alluded in his speaking notes to how the bill is broken up in regard to the children's charter. He alluded to the family violence and things like that, but more important to me is how his department and the minister have captured under the preamble some of the statements that I think are important. It talks about:

Whereas the well-being, safety, security, education and health of children are priorities for Albertans;

I think you couldn't say anything more simply yet capture more in what he said in that particular preamble.

He goes on to talk about:

Whereas Albertans recognize that children are the future of the province and that ensuring that every child has the opportunity to become a successful adult will benefit society as a whole;

It goes on to say:

Whereas programs and services for children are most effective when they are provided through a collaborative and multi-disciplinary approach;

It goes on further:

Whereas the Government of Alberta is committed to working with individuals, families, communities, non-governmental organizations and the private sector, as well as with other governments, to support and create opportunities for children;

It continues on, Mr. Speaker.

Whereas sound, evidence based research . . .

And that's one of the things that I'm going to ask the minister about, his comments on the evidence-based research. This is just personal. I sometimes have a problem when we talk about evidence-based research because it depends on who has the evidence-based research. Sometimes I think we get boxed into what evidence-based research you're looking at, Minister. I know you have put a lot of time and energy into this because I know your work ethic, and I'd like to ask you, maybe as we go through the process of the bill, what you're talking about when you talk about:

. . . is critical in the design and development of effective actions to allow, encourage and support successful outcomes for children and families;

When I talk about evidence-based research, you know, just so the minister has an idea where I'm going on this, if you have an alcohol addiction problem, for example, AADAC follows the 12-

step program. As a former drug and alcohol counsellor, that has been around for as long as I can remember, yet we've got some other addiction resources that don't necessarily follow the 12-step program. You might have a 16- or 17-year-old entering a drug and alcohol rehabilitation centre and not necessarily believing in the 12-step drug program, but they may have another program that they follow that could be just as effective as AADAC's 12-step program.

I look around at some of the family violence centres. I'm very involved with Youville women's residence, Discovery House – there are all sorts – and they all follow what they consider a successful model in what they're trying to do when they're trying to get women and children up and successful again. If we're talking about an evidence-based research model, are you using particular evidence from one area, or is it what is most successful? I always hate to see us getting boxed into some evidence-based research that could curtail what is being used successfully somewhere else.

You go on to talk about:

Whereas appropriate sharing of information between individuals and organizations planning or providing programs and services for children is critical to ensuring successful outcomes for children and families;

Well, the minister knows full well how long we have been trying to advocate in regard to the sharing of information. Both he as the Justice minister and I as the former Solicitor General and minister of children's services know how critical it would be to share information if you have a child that's in care. It might be sharing that information if there are some problems with the educational system, sharing some information with the police. So I like that. It's something that I've been advocating for many years. In fact, when I was chair of the safe communities task force, it was one of the recommendations that we put forward, so I'm quite pleased to see the minister include that in his preamble, to make it one of the priorities on where he's going to go on this particular legislation.

Some of the questions that we have about this particular legislation – and I shouldn't use the word “we,” but I personally because on this side of the House everybody, all of my colleagues, may have different questions on different pieces of the legislation, so it's up to them to speak.

We talk about the children's charter. I like the idea of a children's charter. I think that what the minister is trying to do when he talks about how the charter must recognize the following principles – and he's got five principles – captures what Albertans would like to see under a children's charter.

My concern about the charter – and the minister is certainly going to be able to respond back – is that he wants Bill 25 passed, and then he plans on going out and consulting with Albertans over the summer and probably the fall in regard to the children's charter. I'm a little uneasy that we're putting the cart before the horse. If we're putting what we want in the bill and what they want to see under the children's charter and then they want to go out and reach out to Albertans, does that mean that when we come back in the fall, we are going to see amendments brought forward to Bill 25? How are we going to do that? So I have some questions there.

The other thing that I have some concerns about – and I know that his department is listening, and they're going to provide the minister with answers – is that under the children's charter he's got: “the Minister may review the Children's Charter from time to time and amend or repeal and replace it as the Minister considers appropriate.”

Well, one of the things that I have learned in this Legislature, when I was with the government formerly and being on the legislative review committee – I can't even remember what it's called – was that the minister taught me the difference between “may” and “must,” small, little words. One is three letters; the other one is four letters. It's your complimenting day, Minister. The minister took me under his wing when he was the Justice minister and told me in his lawyerly talk, because I'm not a lawyer, how important it is that there is a difference between the words “may” and “must.”

Minister, I know your staff is listening, and I have some questions about the charter, so you can maybe get from them the answers to the questions I have. Under 2(3) you talk about how “the Minister may review the Children's Charter from time to time and amend or repeal and replace it as the Minister considers appropriate.” I guess my question is: why can't we make that a must? People change. Things change in this world. You and I go back a long time, and now you can see what's going on in the social media with all the technology and things like that. I really think that if you were seriously talking about a children's charter and you seriously wanted, as you say, children first and you seriously want to do what is to the benefit of the children, then make a simple change in the wording to “must” regarding the review.

You, as we well know, are in one of these positions where there's no time limit. You could be the Minister of Human Services for the next two years, and a new minister may come in and like the idea of something new in the charter.

3:50

I just think that if we're going to be as bold as to talk about a charter, my understanding – and you can correct me if I'm wrong – is that there is nowhere in North America that we can use as a guide. I've just done a little bit of research in regard to a children's charter. I understand that there are, I think, two cities that have a children's charter, and they are Toronto and Regina. So there is nothing to compare as to who's had a children's charter, what's successful in the children's charter, what needs to be in the children's charter, and what we can do better in the charter? If we're going to be as bold as being the first province in North America – I haven't done a lot of research – then why can't we look at the children's charter and we review it every year?

It goes into that under Review. “The Minister shall conduct a Government-wide review of policies, programs and services affecting children and shall, after concluding the review, lay a report respecting the review before the Legislative Assembly if it is then sitting” or after 15 days. I guess my question on that is: when? Are you look at doing that yearly? Are you looking at doing it every two years? When do you plan on doing the reviewing?

I know that we were in receipt just recently of a letter from the Privacy Commissioner in regard to information sharing for the purpose of providing services. We need to discuss that as a caucus, obviously, after being alerted by the Privacy Commissioner to your act. I personally want to be on record as the former minister of children's services and, if I may, as the Health critic for the Wildrose that I like this. You and I have been advocating this for a long time. I think it's important for information to be shared. I think if there's anything that has to be done, maybe it's an amendment on that particular that may address some of the issues that she has, you know, some of the requirements.

We haven't had the opportunity to talk, obviously. This came to us just very briefly, and I'm sure that you're going to get up and

speeches some of the responses that you had in regard to hearing from the Privacy Commissioner.

You talk about the Child and Youth Advocate Act as amended. As I said, Minister, we just got this bill laid on the table. We're busy trying to take care of other pieces of legislation. There are things that need to be questioned.

Under the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act you talk about taking out the director and substituting a child intervention worker. I guess my question is: is the worker the only one making the decision? I have a great deal of faith in the social workers in this province. There is always that small percentage you have a problem with. If there happen to be some problems between the worker and the family, if there is some animosity between the worker and the family, leaving it up to one worker, is there a way that can happen? I was dealing with a situation in my own riding that was a seven-year fight for a family to clear their name. I like the idea of the social worker being able to make the decision because they're trained to be able to make decisions. What recourse has anyone got if we have that sort of problem, if there is a dispute between the family and the worker? Previously the director used to have to do all of that.

Minister, all of these sections in the bill are things that I think need to be done. I think, quite frankly, you and your department have done a good job on this bill. There are so many things in this bill that I like, that I think need to be done.

We talk about foster parents and the unbelievable job that they do to become foster parents. A good friend of mine has fostered, I think, seven children. There are three things that I could not do. I couldn't be a foster parent because I have, I guess, an attachment disorder. I don't like to let go of anything and would be very afraid of having – I'm sure I'd probably have 35 children now. I couldn't be a foster parent or a foster dog parent, if I may say that, because I would probably never give up the dog for that particular reason. What I've learned over the last couple of weeks is that I could not work in a hospice. So there are some things in this life that I'd be more than prepared to tackle.

As I indicated, my friends are foster parents and are 98 per cent successful. They've raised the foster kids. They've come back, and they've celebrated weddings with them and all sorts of things, and that's because of the loving, caring, nurturing comfort that foster parents have provided to these children when they've gone into custody and have been fostered out.

With those brief comments, I am going to sit down because I know there are others that want to work. I think it's going to give us, myself, the opportunity to go home and do some studying, read the bill a little more clearly. I know, Minister, that you're not afraid of an e-mail or a phone call if I have questions. If I may say so, I'm going to be bugging you a little bit just to get some clarification. I also know that the staff in your department would be more than willing to answer any questions.

I want to end by saying good job, Minister. I think we're lucky to have you and the department, and we're lucky to be able to talk about this particular bill. I will probably be wearing one of your pins when this bill passes, so thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I'll recognize the Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise to debate Bill 25. Echoing some of the comments of the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, congratulations to the minister for the diligence and, I guess, commitment to detail. Obviously, he's had big changes in his department over the last year, and

there are significant implications for that in relation to child care, a recognition that there are weaknesses in communication across different departments that deal with children, a recognition of the need for more research-based and evidence-based policy-making and action for the interests of children and their families.

So, yes, a job well done. A job well started, I should say, because I think it's early. It's unfortunate that it's so late in the legislative timetable. It's a tremendously large bill. It means that if we're going to do due diligence, we're going to have to spend some time with this bill, and I'm disappointed that it didn't come earlier or that we don't have more of a chance. I hope that the minister would consider some alternatives if, in fact, our session is drawing to a close, as it appears to be.

There appears to be, again, a question of haste and not enough preparation time for us in this. I would have to ask who was consulted on some of the decisions that are being proposed here, some of which are fairly significant in terms of human rights, in terms of sharing information, in terms of who has the authority to do what under what circumstances. Some questions come up around these issues which are, yeah, very significant and that I certainly would not be happy pushing through without a full discussion, especially since hearing from the Privacy Commissioner, and some sense that this is consistent and not duplicating or not confusing people with the other privacy and information acts that we deal with and that everyone in Alberta deals with.

The other thing that surprised me was to hear from some staff that this totally came out of the blue, that staff in your department had no idea this was coming forward. They had no input, no sense that some of the changes that they see before them have been made with serious implications, some feel, to their authority to make decisions for clients or at least the appearance that the authority to make decisions on behalf of a child might be transferred to a private entity, to a foster parent when in fact the buck stops at the government, at the minister's office, at the Crown, as is indicated in the report, but can be delegated, it appears now, under this new act. So there's confusion there. I can say that there's some significant anxiety among staff, who aren't clear where this is headed and, certainly, why they weren't consulted and given a chance to have some input into this.

4:00

The third area I suppose would be his initiating comments about poverty reduction and the question, I think to quote as accurately as possible, of a community-owned strategy for poverty reduction, which sounds like a code word for downloading the poverty reduction strategy onto the community, instead of saying a shared responsibility for poverty reduction with the community. I believe I heard the minister in his introductory remarks say: a community-owned poverty reduction strategy. I'd like to know how that jibes with a partnership, a collaboration, a sense that we're going to do this together, not download it and then have someone else to hold accountable if the poverty reduction strategy doesn't achieve its goals. I would just appreciate some clarification around that, especially when we've seen it happening in other areas.

With those comments, Mr. Speaker, maybe I'll revert to a second point that I made about authority to make decisions about a child in a particular set of circumstances, maybe a child that is going on a trip, and now the minister wants to ensure that there's a simple, quick way of giving permission for that child to go on a trip without going through a big, long list of individuals to consult with.

This kind of change that I think the minister is suggesting, if I can quote him again, is doing what Albertans want. When did you ask Albertans if they wanted to give the Crown the power to

delegate that authority to either the foster parent or to a private agency? Was that actually discussed in your consultations? Did people actually say that they wanted the Crown to devolve that authority in some instances where they felt it appropriate to the foster parent or to the private agency that's providing child services? It's a question. I don't know the answer. Some of these issues have come up just on first blush in our going through the bill and questions that need to be answered.

Those, I think, Mr. Speaker, identify some of the key concerns that I have at first review. Again, I hope the minister will take them in the spirit in which they were intended to ensure that the children are put first, that the community has indeed a full understanding and that we have a full understanding of the implications of the potential shift of authority from the government jurisdiction to possibly other jurisdictions, that we seriously look at some of the concerns that the Privacy Commissioner has given us that create ambiguity, uncertainty, duplication, in fact, perhaps confusion around who can get access to what information, under what conditions, and with whose permission when already, I thought, as expressed by the Information and Privacy Commissioner, we have a good bill that addresses some of these issues.

Just for the record, the commissioner has recommended – and she has indicated five different concerns about the privacy issues here – that at the very least the bill needs to be amended to include mandatory requirements for privacy impact assessments; a duty to record disclosures, including disclosure by information systems; and a duty to report privacy breaches to the commissioner's office. I take that seriously, and I know the minister does.

I would be interested in hearing some of the discussion around this. I certainly hope that we're not going to ram this through in the next couple of days. This is an important bill, with many implications, many concerns, and I think we all need to be sure that it's going to provide the results that we all want and that children deserve.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for questions or comments.

Seeing none, I'll recognize the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to rise to speak to Bill 25 in second reading. As has been mentioned a couple of times already, this 72-page piece of legislation was tabled yesterday, and although we did get a briefing last week, this is the first time we've had the opportunity to look at the actual legislation in full. Many of us are scrambling to get a real sense of what it is that the government is trying to achieve here.

Mr. Speaker, when it comes to protecting children in Alberta and when it comes to reducing the experience of child poverty in Alberta, this government has a tendency to overstate its accomplishments, shall we say. I use that particular characterization of their activities in this regard judiciously. I believe that's a judicious description of the way in which the government engages with this particular set of challenges experienced by so many vulnerable Albertans. As a result, it's very important, I believe, for us to look very carefully at what exactly it is that this act is doing. Unfortunately, this is not a government that has earned a tremendous amount of trust when it comes to dealing with these issues.

There are at least four things, perhaps five, that occur to me as being areas that require additional consideration. The first one, which has been mentioned and, frankly, concerns me the greatest,

is the issue of restructuring the ministry so as to essentially take responsibility away from the director of child protection vested in the Crown, which of course is what it always was, and then expand the opportunity to delegate authority to what is referred to as child intervention workers, Mr. Speaker. Now, in our briefing we inquired: well, what is a child intervention worker? We were assured that that would be defined by regulation. That is profoundly concerning to me.

There are two lines of concern with respect to this process. The first is: who is this government going to include in the definition of a child intervention worker? We have on record the Premier saying that she thinks there is the opportunity to contract out the work done in the ministry, that was once children's services, to nonprofits, to charities, to volunteer organizations, and to the private sector. The Premier is on record as saying that she thinks that kind of work can be done there rather than by government workers who are directly accountable to Albertans through this Legislature.

When I'm told that we need to just trust these guys around the issue of who a child intervention worker will be, frankly, Mr. Speaker, I simply can't do that. We have so many examples in this province already where extremely important services provided to a broad range of vulnerable Albertans are consistently deprofessionalized, underpaid, and understaffed in nonprofit, arm's-length organizations across this province. Whether you are talking about the care of the mentally ill, whether you are talking about the care of seniors, whether you are talking about the care of disabled Albertans, whether you are talking about the care of children, in every case this government takes every opportunity it can find to reduce its own staff and to download those responsibilities onto nonprofits, volunteer organizations, and charities, many of whom are struggling to provide the level of qualification and time necessary to do the job that a professional would say represents best practice.

We do that in almost every human services setting in this province, Mr. Speaker, because, so clearly, this is not a priority of this government. Then, of course, strangely, the Premier actually believes we can increase the degree to which we do that. Then we have a social policy framework that talks about the government moving away from being a leader and a funder and a service provider and instead is a convener and a partner. We have that announcement made side by side with a rep from Safeway Inc.

4:10

We're talking about reducing poverty. I am absolutely astounded by some of the fundamental presumptions that seem to underlie the direction that this Premier seems to want to take this province when it comes to continuing the job that at this point they have really not done very well at all. Of course, we have a huge gap between rich and poor in this province. We have growing numbers of children living in poverty, and we have growing numbers of people who are homeless, yet we are the richest province in the country. Clearly, we are not doing a very good job. The last thing that I think we should do is take our bad decisions and exacerbate them.

That being said, this ability to delegate these authorities and the responsibility to who knows who is very concerning to me.

Dr. Swann: It's dangerous.

Ms Notley: It is dangerous indeed, Mr. Chair. I'm very concerned about that.

I am also concerned that what's really going on here is that the government is trying to distance itself from responsibility for what happens when they make one of the most important decisions that government ever makes. Taking a child from their family and putting them somewhere else is a very, very profoundly important decision. It should only be done in limited circumstances, and it should only be done with the greatest level of thought and care and consideration and time and investigation that is dedicated to that process.

Then when that child is taken away, they need to be cared for with the greatest level of skill and time and commitment and resources available because once that child is taken from their family, they are in crisis. Let us be clear. If you take a child from their family, you've created a crisis. You may be pulling them from one crisis, but they are still in crisis.

This idea that this task that we do in this province, Mr. Speaker, can be done by contracted agencies, who then contract out so that we've got people making \$14 an hour and who may or may not have a six-month diploma in child care services and child protection and child intervention, is incredibly disrespectful of the importance of that work and the nature of that work and the sophistication of the work and the skill requirement of that work. I'm very concerned about this, and I need to see what the government contemplates being the recipient of this incredible level of authority that the government takes upon itself.

The other element of that, which, of course, is problematic, is that even where you're downloading that authority onto individual social workers who may even still be amongst that small group of social workers who are still directly employed by this provincial government, the question then becomes: does that social worker have the time and the ability and the authority to do what their professional organization tells them is best practice? The director of child protection can make those decisions, but if the front-line social worker is told to have a caseload that is 40 per cent above what they believe is best practice, then they simply have to do that. Indeed, that is what's been happening for years, Mr. Speaker. How do you then make that person legally responsible for those decisions when they're only able to make decisions about part of the job? That's also a problem.

The next thing I want to talk about, Mr. Speaker, is the issue of the children's charter. Now, we all love the idea of a children's charter, giving children rights and giving them a way to hang onto some rights and maybe bootstrap themselves into some higher quality services than what they might be receiving in this province right now. Unfortunately, what we see in this legislation is extremely vague, and really all it does is that it gives the government and the Premier an opportunity to send out a press release saying: "Look at us. Look at us. We've introduced a children's charter." The word "charter" is so generally well respected that everyone thinks that means good things, but the reality is that the substance of this charter is lacking significantly.

My view, Mr. Speaker, is that in a province that is the wealthiest in the country and in a province that has the wealthiest people in the country and in a province that leaves \$10 billion on the table to give back to the wealthiest people in the country every year, when we're talking about the rights of children who are in the care, whether temporary or permanent custody, of this government, we should be able to write a charter that says at the very least, like the UN charter, that children should always have enough to eat and that children should always have a roof over their head.

The fact of the matter is that right now in this province – in this province – where we are so wealthy and we leave \$10 billion on

the table every year, children who are in the care and custody of this government have no roof over their head and go to the food bank for food. That is shameful. That is shameful, Mr. Speaker. We should write a charter that says that that is prohibited. In this province, where we are so proud of our resource wealth, we should be able to write a charter that says that that won't happen anymore. Until I see that, I frankly can't give the concept of a charter a whole lot of deference.

Now, the third thing that I'd like to talk about, because I'm running out of time very quickly, is the question of information sharing, that's been raised by the Privacy Commissioner although I also had those concerns when I briefly looked at the act yesterday. Now, I understand and respect what the minister is talking about when he talks about the need to be able to share information between silos when it comes, particularly, to ensuring the safety of a child; you know, when you're talking about a teacher being aware of a violent situation or a risk of violence and not being able to tell a social worker or vice versa, those kinds of things, or if a health care worker is aware of those things.

The minister had Sheldon Kennedy standing beside him at his announcement yesterday, and he had police officials standing beside him at the announcement. I have sympathy for that argument. I realize there are privacy concerns, but I have sympathy for that argument. What I don't have sympathy for, Mr. Speaker, is the way this legislation is written because this legislation goes well beyond that. This legislation gives service providers – and we don't know who they are. They may well not be employees of the government. They may well be for-profit daycares – we don't know – or other for-profit child service providers. It could be Walmart, for all we know, if they come up with an after school program. We don't know – we do not know – who the service providers are.

It gives them the ability to share information not only about the kids but about the parents and not when the child is at risk of serious injury or violence or death but simply when, in that person's opinion, the best interests of the child are served by sharing that information. But we don't know if that person, that service provider, is even educated to make such a decision to reach that conclusion. It could be, you know, that someone who is 19 years old and is a camp counsellor has decided that they think it's important to tell the child's teacher in the same town that mom had postpartum depression five years ago and was in the hospital for five months. The minister is looking at me incredulously, but the fact of the matter is that the way your act is written, that could happen. There is nothing in the way your act is written that would stop that from happening.

That is what we need to ensure doesn't happen. That needs to be corrected. The act needs to be corrected. I'm all for sharing information to keep people safe. I am not for allowing the personal details of parents to be shared indiscriminately amongst a group of people, that this government is not even prepared to define, on the basis of opinions that I'm not convinced they are qualified to reach.

4:20

It is a huge thing when you give them the ability to share the medical information, for instance, of parents. It's too much. Particularly when you look at the profile of the families that are impacted by this, we're looking primarily at indigenous and First Nations Albertans and low-income Albertans. These are the people whose privacy rights will be completely eliminated.

The final thing I want to talk about is the issue of the family violence review committee. All I can say there is that it's long overdue. It should have been done a long time ago, and it needs to be more transparent.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for questions or comments. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the member and my colleague for bringing up some interesting points and setting sort of another tenor to this discussion. We, in fact, with such a substantive piece of legislation, just can't hold forth with some accolades and then hand it over to the government. You've given me some food for thought.

What I particularly wanted to know more about is this children's charter. I've just been reading it over here again. We only got this thing a couple of days ago, right? [interjection] One day ago, yeah. I'm just wondering what's missing there. I'm having a hard time, you know, looking at this not just as a document that is setting parameters or a frame for this legislation but on a legal basis framework as well. I'm just wondering what we could do to perhaps make this children's charter a little more substantive.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona to respond.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much. You know, as any lawyer will know, sort of the penultimate charter in Canada is the Charter, which is part of our Constitution, and that, of course, actually sets out a number of rights and a number of rights which are enforceable. It's meaningful (a) because it delineates a number of rights and (b) because it's enforceable.

This charter doesn't delineate. Maybe in one area there are a few rights that are delineated, but overall most of what it's talking about is government policy. It's written in a way that it's not enforceable even if it were enforceable, but in fact the charter itself is not presented in the act in a way for it to be enforceable, so really it's being called a charter but is not really a charter.

The other thing is that when you go back, for instance, to Canada's Charter, when Parliament first had discussions about that Charter, there was extensive debate at that time about whether or not that Charter should include reference to economic equality and whether or not people should be protected from discrimination on the basis of poverty. There was extensive discussion at that time about that concept. Now, it was ultimately rejected even though the NDP at the time argued vociferously for it to be included.

But even though it was rejected there, if this was really a charter, Mr. Speaker, we would address those issues in this charter because, again, as I've said, we are talking simply about children, and we are talking about a province that's supposed to be the wealthiest province in the country. We're not talking necessarily about economic equality. We're talking about those basic human rights that the United Nations talks about, which is the right to nutrition, adequate nutrition, and the right to a roof over your head at night. If we really want to talk about a meaningful charter, something that's bold, let's talk about that.

The other thing I wanted to really quickly mention as well is that the family violence review committee as it currently exists is set up just like the child incident review committee. As far as I've seen, I've seen no actual investigation report ever publicly

released by that committee. I suspect that this committee is set up in exactly the same way, and given that we are a province which, unfortunately, has the highest level of domestic violence in the country, we should be ensuring that the organization that reviews these incidents is compelled to report to the public about its investigations and what went wrong.

You can do that, Mr. Speaker, and still protect people's privacy. You absolutely can – I've seen it done before – but it should be done because that's part of the way that we engage the public on this very, very important issue, which is the preponderance of domestic violence in this province. This legislation allows the minister to keep the whole thing behind closed doors and keep it secret for heaven knows how long. That's the last thing that this issue needs in this province. It needs to be very clearly public when these kinds of things occur.

I'm disappointed to see that they've set up the committee, but at the same time they've made it very clear that the committee need not publicly report and, rather, just will do an annual report. Anyone here who has ever read an annual report produced by this government, if they could get through the orange and the blue and the various and sundry message-box language that, coincidentally, equates with election campaigns, if they can get through that stuff, they rarely find a great deal of substantive information. It's disappointing that that is not included in the act as it relates to that piece because otherwise it's a good piece.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I recognize the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, followed by Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Bikman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I certainly hope that I can add to the discussion and share something today that will be of benefit as we consider this very important act about our children, our most precious commodity, our future. We want to ensure that it will be as good as possible. Concerns about abuse and neglect are very serious and have to be taken seriously and need to be addressed properly.

I admire and respect the minister and believe that he truly wants to make Alberta the best possible place for children to be raised. I think this act has some very good parts to it. I think that we always need to exercise caution when we're listening to children report certain things, being sure that we're discreet in our investigation, a thorough investigation, remembering that when we hear only one side of a story, it's like trying to get the news from reading the editorial page. We need both sides or all sides. There may be, obviously, more than just two.

It's very important that we get this act right, with adequate input and open discussion, especially by those of us here in this Legislature, that have been elected to review these kinds of things. It's always a little worrisome to me and a little bit suspect, too, when I get a limited-time offer. I rarely buy a used car from somebody trying to sell me something where I've only got until tonight, you know, at 5 o'clock or whatever to make the deal.

I don't mean to say that you're acting in a suspicious way, Mr. Minister, but after almost 70 years of living, I always want to take a little extra time to look at that. Sometimes I'd rather walk away from that hot deal than take it without having time to do my due diligence. I've been burned seriously at times in my life when I haven't done adequate due diligence. I've been taught by a very wise and successful man that when you think you've done enough due diligence, you're probably only half done.

Of course, we all love children. As you know, I probably feel that way, loving children more than some other people, based on the number that I've had the opportunity to love and be engaged

with as a child rearer, as a parent. I think that one of the things that we need to consider when we are looking at and creating a piece of legislation as important as this one – and we all recognize how important it is – is the foundational question. Will this act strengthen families, or will it undermine them? If so, how will it be good? What are the dangers, and how will we mitigate against them?

I'd like to quote for a moment now rather loosely – I'll be adding to and paraphrasing – from a document that my wife and I have used to help guide us in our responsibilities to raise children to be respectful, with all of the things that we all want our children to have and grow up with. It's from a document called *The Family: A Proclamation to the World*. I'm going to quote some parts word for word, and some parts I've edited to make it appropriate, hopefully, for this situation in our Legislature.

4:30

It starts out. Parents have “a solemn responsibility to love and care for each other and for their children,” a fundamental “duty to rear their children in love and righteousness,” to provide for their physical, social, emotional, mental, and spiritual needs, and to “teach them to love and serve one another . . . and be law-abiding citizens wherever they live.” Mothers and fathers are accountable “for the discharge of these obligations.” Happiness in family life is most likely to be achieved when founded upon sound principles taught in the wisdom literature of the ages. Successful families are “established and maintained on principles of faith, prayer, repentance, forgiveness, respect, love, compassion, work, and wholesome recreational activities.” Parents are obliged to “help one another as equal partners. Disability, death, or other circumstances may necessitate individual adaption. Extended families should lend support when needed.”

When not available, neighbours, friends, churches, and other volunteers ought to assist. Government should always be a last resort, not the first. The disintegration of the family will bring upon individuals, communities, provinces, and nations a repeat of the calamities experienced by all civilizations and societies that have risen and fallen over the ages. As responsible citizens and officers of the government or at least elected representatives of the people we should promote “measures designed to maintain and strengthen the family as the fundamental unit of society.”

Parental rights and responsibilities. There are some things that are best done by parents, wherever possible, and I think this act identifies the primacy of parents' responsibilities and their rights as well. We talk about rights, but we don't talk about responsibilities as often as I think we need to or should. Teaching what a healthy, loving relationship is between parents is an obligation we have where possible and where appropriate. Principles, morals, values, integrity, reliability, trustworthiness, respect, the work ethic, importance of education, service to others, helping those in need, recognizing need, charity, accountability, honour, discernment: many of these lessons are best taught as parents work alongside their children, whether it's planting a garden or mowing a lawn or shoveling a neighbour's sidewalk and then your own, whether it's helping mom or dad make a casserole to take to a needy neighbour. These are things that are best taught at home wherever possible.

My experience with students in the federally funded introduction to trades course that Lethbridge College taught for many years as well as from teaching at two reserves, one in my riding and one right next to my riding, the Kainai reserve, with the headquarters at Stand Off, and the Piikani reserve at Brocket, taught me – well, I was asked to assist there because the college was acknowledged and recognized for doing a good job teaching

their students how to weld and how to overhaul and how to frame and how to wire. Prospective employers or companies were hiring them as apprentices and helping with their education, but where the college was falling down was in some of the basic life skills. I was approached and asked to develop a module to teach that during the first week of their approximately 12-week course. We called it life skills and employability. Society and some parents were neglecting teaching these important principles.

Sometimes parents are overworked. Sometimes parents have two jobs. Circumstances can vary, so there's a tendency for us to want to step in. Sometimes that stepping in is best done by the extended family, by an older sibling, by neighbours and friends. Again, government obviously has a role, but it ought to be as a last resort. You and I have talked about this, Mr. Minister. I'm able to refer to you as you in this sitting.

It's important that children learn the law of the harvest. I've been misquoted as I've tried to refer to that at times, much to my embarrassment. The law of the harvest is the simple principle, that people of the land understand, that if you don't plant in the spring and weed and fertilize and water and nurture, you don't have much harvest in the fall. That's a true principle of life. A farmer learns that you can't take shortcuts.

In the educational system you can take shortcuts. We think that the object is to get an A when, really, the object is to master the material. But is there anybody here who's never crammed for an exam? What's the half-life of crammed knowledge? About 15 minutes after the end of the exam you've forgotten most of it, right? Who wants to be operated on by a doctor who learned how to beat the system and cram for the exams? Not me.

Well, our children need to be taught that, and that's best taught at home. If we're creating programs or creating opportunities for children who are in situations of abuse and neglect, I hope that it would include helping the foster parents to teach some of these basic principles.

I'm married to a woman who grew up in foster homes because her mother and father had problems. Her father died, and her mother suffered because of that, and the children needed to be placed in an orphanage or with other family. My wife is one who was in foster care and experienced conditional love, love that was there only if they liked what you were doing, and if you weren't doing it, then they withdrew their affection. That has created trauma in many people in that situation, trauma that's very hard to address through the efforts of social work. It requires incredible dedication.

I admire our hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for acknowledging the challenge that it is to play that role. Those that do it and do it effectively have my deepest admiration and respect and appreciation. As I said, my wife, Sheila, is one who experienced that, and it's created many challenges that we've needed to address together. I'm grateful for the help that we both received with that. That's part of what happens when government steps in. We want to make sure that they step in where necessary with good guidelines to help that intervention be successful in a way that benefits not just the child but ultimately perhaps the subsequent marriages, work relationships, and parenting responsibilities. It's a big step, and it's very important that it be done right.

I want this bill to succeed. I hope that it will address these issues. I want to support it after it's been thoroughly examined and vetted, after we've been given the chance to assist you and the government, Mr. Minister, in the critical due diligence necessary. I know that you've taken the time and your department has taken the time to get a lot of input and talk to a lot of people. Hopefully, it's included people like me who have successfully parented – I'm

not trying to toot my horn, but by any reasonable standard of success I think that we have managed to do that – or those people that have provided foster care successfully, looking at the ones who have struggled and created more problems than they solved to make sure that the act will address those issues in an effective, compassionate, and tender way, that will produce the result that we desire.

We need to have it clear in our minds what result we are after. We talk about results-based budgeting. We need to make sure that this is a results-based act, that we have the big picture that we're after drilled down to the micro, the individual, and what result we hope it will achieve and make sure that it's going to do that. I submit that this isn't something we can do in 24 or 48 hours or by next week, as much as that might upset the apparent timetable that exists. Once again, we're not buying used cars here. We're affecting people's lives by the things that we do and the decisions that we make. How well crafted this bill ultimately is will depend upon input from all stakeholders, certainly including all of us having the opportunity to address the things that I've mentioned and some that I probably, quite frankly, am not smart enough to think of, at least in the amount of time I've had to consider this.

Anyway, I appreciate it. I appreciate the efforts. As I said, I want to support it. I'm sure that given the honour and integrity of the minister involved and the seriousness and the quality of the staff that he has, these issues will be addressed and the proper time will be taken with a calm and reasoned approach, taking a step back, an arm's length, so that we can have some sober pondering and study.

4:40

I hope that we'll have a chance to consult with our constituents and have a chance, through our researchers and ourselves personally, to do some of our own research into studies, not only opinions, of the best sociologists and child psychologists, the methods used by successful parents, as I mentioned, and the things that are being done in other jurisdictions. We don't have to reinvent the wheel. It's possible that there are some jurisdictions that are addressing this very, very effectively, and we ought to make sure that if they are, we can learn and benefit from the mistakes that they made getting to that degree of perfection or degree of effectiveness, anyway.

Those are some of my concerns. I appreciate the opportunity to share my perspective with you, and I hope that Mr. Minister and the government will take these seriously because I've certainly given from my heart as well as from my experience, and the education that I have has prompted me to share this with you today.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I want to express my appreciation in listening to the member's comments about this bill. I was wondering if he could provide a little bit of feedback or input regarding the children's charter, which is on page 3 of the bill. It's defined there, and I'm just wondering if the hon. member feels that there's anything missing from that or if he's satisfied with the wording of the charter or what role this charter could and should play in the context of the whole act.

If I may, Mr. Speaker, the second question which I'll tack on to the hon. member is just looking at the fact that a child intervention

worker is not defined in this act anywhere and if that poses any questions to the hon. member or potential concerns or flags. Who is setting that standard? How is that regulated? Who is by definition a child intervention worker?

I look forward to hearing your comments.

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

Mr. Bikman: Thank you. Thank you for the opportunity to respond and for the compliment, to think somebody my age will actually remember what the first question was now, so I'll answer the second question first. The definitions are kind of like the rules, and the minister was, I think, being a little bit flippant and entertaining us with the comment that rules are – how did you put it?

Mr. Hancock: For when brains run out.

Mr. Bikman: For when brains run out.

Well, I think that rules are like good fences, and good fences make good neighbours, and good clauses and good definitions make good acts. I think that we need to be very careful in any act that we participate in creating – that's assuming that this really is a participatory process – and need to be very, very clear and remove any ambiguity that can possibly exist. It takes good lawyers with good hearts and minds and good research and listening to people like you and me to craft such definitions and such rules and clauses so as to address those things in a clear and defined and limited way. I think that's important, and you've raised an important point. I hope that this is somewhat of an answer or has at least added to our understanding of the issue.

The first question was about the children's charter. Did I remember that correctly? Yippee. All right. As I was reading through this – and I haven't made it all the way through yet, but I will – I circled and starred a couple of issues. I made reference to one of them without making it specifically about the charter. Clause (2)(e) says: "While reinforcing and without in any way derogating from the primary responsibility of parents, guardians and families for their children" and so on. I think it's important that we recognize the paramount role of parents in this, and I'm glad to see that it's addressed. I think that can be strengthened and perhaps should be strengthened. I'm always concerned when a person – and I realize that when we say "minister," we probably mean the ministry and all those people that you'll call upon for support in decision-making. But the next point:

(3) The Minister may review the Children's Charter from time to time and amend or repeal and replace it as the Minister considers appropriate.

Well, I hope that in developing and establishing that children's charter, an awful lot of opportunity to give input and feedback will be given to us, that though it may be crafted and brought to us in a semi-complete or at least a partially prepared form, then we would have a chance to debate it, discuss it, ponder it, and do some more research on it. Maybe we could even be invited to provide some input if this is going to be done over the summer and presented back to us in the fall as part of a complete Bill 25, Children First Act. I think it's important that we do consider that.

There are some things that some of you will think are important to include. There will be some things that others may think ought not be included. That needs to be considered because we need to be very careful in doing this. This will be an historic first, and getting it right will take time. If we consider the long-term impact of what this bill can and will do . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I'll recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to our previous speakers for providing some illumination here on Bill 25, the Children First Act. You know, I've been working through this very substantive piece of legislation both yesterday and today, having to move it to the top of my list because it suddenly appeared in its entirety. I was astonished to see how comprehensive the legislation is, encompassing a number of existing acts and making amendments as well as substantive new legislation on its own. For that, and for the complexity, or the edifice, that's been created here, I certainly do acknowledge the minister and the ministry's hard work in putting this together.

Not to say that I am opposed categorically to all parts of it. Rather, I think in the interests of evidence-based legislation and the application of best practices to looking after children in care in our society and in our province, you know, just at the very least, as the previous speaker from Cardston-Taber-Warner pointed out, we must make sure that we are debating the issues in a substantive bill like this in the fullness of time to ensure that we are moving forward with legislation that we cannot just live with in some sort of compromise but are making changes that will improve the quality of life for children in our province, to ensure that we cover the rights and responsibilities that we have as the state, as the Crown, to reinforce the existing means by which we look after children in this province and also, I think, to reach out and, as I say, use best practices from other jurisdictions to ensure that we perhaps are going further so that we know children in this province are not wanting for nutritional requirements, are not wanting for shelter, are not wanting to fulfill their education needs to the fullness of their ability and that we look to creating the best opportunities for everyone.

You know, when we go back to the first principles of how we look after the youngest in our society, I think that equality comes first to mind. If we're not creating an equal environment in which young people can thrive, then we are setting the template for inequality and for the problems that are just exacerbated as those same children grow up to be in positions of responsibility and to form the framework of our society later on. So equality is something that I think should be the first principle that we aim for in this House in making legislation, particularly here with Bill 25, the Children First Act.

4:50

As far as I can see, Mr. Speaker, just from the beginning this bill is amending, as I said, many other pieces of legislation pertaining to children inside and outside of care. It has the children's charter here, which I'm particularly intrigued about and was seeking some more clarification on. I think it sort of enshrines a government-wide review of policy and programs in regard to children in general and then expands that information sharing so that service providers can share personal information about children, parents and guardians, and other service providers.

Now, I've never sort of been sitting in the Legislature and had a reaction come back so quickly as it did on the last point that I made about this legislation. That came from the Privacy Commissioner. Within hours of this bill being released, we saw that the commissioner was raising some serious concerns about that information sharing.

You know, as I said, we're all just learning about this, but I guess it brings to mind my first concern about this substantive piece of legislation coming towards the end of the spring session

in that: are we being obliged to rush through this? Are we putting ourselves in a position where we will have unforeseen consequences coming from Bill 25 after we leave this House at the end of the spring session?

I think that the Privacy Commissioner has done us a service. I'm just looking for it. Here it is: Commissioner Identifies Privacy Concerns with Bill 25. I'm very happy that this did come out. I'll just summarize some of the concerns that came out in this release.

[Ms Kennedy-Glans in the chair]

Madam Speaker, it becomes you very well. Absolutely. I'm going to stay within the rules even more than I usually do for the balance of my speech.

It says:

Bill 25 erodes individuals' ability to control what happens to their own personal and health information by broadening the ability to share information without consent. The ability to say yes or no to the sharing of one's own information is, fundamentally, what privacy laws are intended to provide – control.

Further, she states:

Individuals will not necessarily know what information has been collected about them, by whom, or for what specific purpose. This is contrary to fundamental privacy principles of transparency, openness and accountability, and reduces individuals' ability to exercise their rights to complain or ask for a review [as well].

Again, I'm talking about unforeseen consequences, Madam Speaker. You know, as I say, this came out within hours of the introduction of this bill, and I think it should raise all our attention here in this House in regard to our responsibility to create good legislation.

The bill as well has some amendments. Statutory authority is now provided to child intervention workers and not the director in the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act. You know, I would like to see clarification on that because if you're moving that authority down the line of the people who are responsible for providing children's services, I just want to be assured that that doesn't mean that the Crown or the state is abdicating any sense of control or responsibility, ultimately, for the protection of children in care. Of course, if you're moving it down to the workers, unless you're contracting out that responsibility, you are potentially putting that person into a position of responsibility. Basically, to contract that responsibility out through a payment or so forth or contractual obligation, when, in fact, the ultimate responsibility of a child in care must be under the Crown – any erosion of that responsibility I don't think is in the best interest of anyone, really.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The amendments in here also seem to expand the ability of the Child and Youth Advocate to give evidence in legal proceedings, allow former guardians of a child now under permanent guardianship to apply for an order to terminate, and then some other issues as well.

Now, I guess there are one or two things that I would like to point out in the brief time that I have here in second reading. I would like to focus more on, again, this idea of providing statutory authority to child intervention workers, the front-line staff, as opposed to the director in the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act. In the brief 24 hours that we've had to ask the front-line workers about this, we've received word back that they are very concerned about this.

As far as we can see, this change seems to come from the well-publicized court case in 2009 where the director was found to be

personally in contempt of court. The Hon. Justice Jean Côté in his ruling described the child intervention system as a “complex administrative structure” that according to evidence in law “must exacerbate opacity and the opportunities for deniability.”

Now, the government argued that the judge’s view of this law would necessitate a restructuring of the whole child protection administrative system. So it seems as though Bill 25 is a response to this 2009 case and is, in fact, a restructuring of the whole system. Now the front-line staff will have statutory authority, which formerly was invested in the most senior officials, and it means as well that front-line staff will be held responsible for everything, even though many decisions are made, in fact, by more senior people in the department and front-line staff have no real power to commandeer funds and to make that level of responsible decision.

Our view is that the government is transferring their statutory authority and responsibility for child protection away from the director and to the front-line service providers. And because the Premier has talked about contracting out more services, there is the potential for the government to contract out more to nonprofit agencies, charities, private contracts, private businesses, the responsibility for custodial decisions – right? – thereby contracting out their own liability. The definition of child intervention workers, as my colleague pointed out here previously, does little to prevent this.

We have a problem here, Mr. Speaker, as I said before in summation, where the potential for moving that responsibility away from the Crown, away from the highest level of decision-makers to the front line I think creates confusion and a detrimental sort of opportunity to buy or sell that authority out to a private contractor of child services.

The bill also, Mr. Speaker, seems to make it much easier to share information between service providers, which, as I read before, seems to raise a great deal of concern about privacy.

The bill also seems to allow a new family violence death review committee to submit reports to the minister, one that never will be publicly released and another that will be released when the minister chooses to do so. When we’ve seen many controversial deaths and injury in care, it is really becoming more obvious that the lack of transparency in regard to these things needs to be expanded, not contracted. You know, in our view, this seems to be in this present bill another way to control information that Albertans ultimately deserve to know about.

5:00

Mr. Speaker, in closing, as I said, the bill is substantive and comprehensive. It’s creating new legislation and amending many other pieces as well. First and foremost, I would echo the last speaker’s comments, that we would want to debate this bill in the fullness of time. I expect and suspect that we will do so. I don’t question the intention of the minister and the ministry in working so hard on this bill or on the integrity of care that Alberta will provide for children both in and out of care. At the same time, we need to take time and effort to ensure that we are not, either through intention or inadvertently, compromising the integrity of how we look after children, both inside and outside of care.

You know, when I looked at the first couple of pages, back to this charter – I will speak more on it later – again, there is just so much more room in this part of the document to nail down some of these issues about ensuring equality and social justice and sustainability throughout this document.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Yes. Thank you. My question to the member with respect to this bill. I know that before he recently was re-elected to this House, he had the opportunity to travel all across Alberta on a number of different occasions in his role with Friends of Medicare and to meet with a lot of people that worked in the nonprofit sector and with social agencies who provide care of differing levels to Albertans who are in need, not always children but sometimes children. I’m just wondering if the member can speak to his view about sort of the need to have professional caregivers and intervention workers making major decisions around where a child lives or with whom a child lives and those kinds of things versus what you’ve observed over your time, your travels in terms of the somewhat stretched volunteer and community organizations who are often recruited into providing this kind of service in the absence of any other service being available.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to my colleague from Edmonton-Strathcona for thinking of that. Quite frankly, as I was looking through this bill, again, not to cast aspersions yet about the intention of how this will actually unfold in reality, I saw a very similar process taking place in our public health care system over this last number of years, where there was a choice being made to contract out different parts of care, including health care that was covered under the Canada Health Act and acute medical services but also the care that includes, I guess, the social work and the housing and the material needs of people that can’t look after themselves.

We saw that unfolding in seniors’ care over this last number of years, and quite frankly, to the member that asked me this question, it has been unfolding in, I think, quite a negative way, unfolding like a slow-moving car crash in lots of ways. We see the increased private contracts going out to deliver public services. You see the redefinition of the language surrounding the care of seniors. It’s the same seniors needing the same care going through the same normal human process that we’ve seen since human beings first started to walk this Earth, yet somehow we’ve seen that they’ve changed the language so that someone moves from long-term care and end-of-life care to continuing care or independent living or whatever it is. It just put a lot of people in a tight spot.

I just don’t want to see that same tendency, that same arc of change taking place in our social services – right? – particularly with children’s care. Hon. member, as you contract these things out, you’re just so much more likely to have a reductive process taking place, where, you know, people are looking for less, not more, and shifting responsibilities around. Ultimately, we know that if a child is in care and a ward of the state, then we need to increase that care and increase the focus of that care with the best professionals that are available and not scrimp and compromise that in any way, shape, or form.

Yes, hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, we look for similarities. Like I said from the outset of my initial speech, we look for best practices and lessons, both good and bad, that we can learn from, paths that we’ve taken before.

As I said and in conclusion, I certainly don’t want to compromise the work that’s gone on here. I can see that the scope of it is substantive. Just in regard to that definition of a child intervention worker, the definition of who is responsible, the

charter that exists in here at the beginning, and a couple of other things, I do have serious concerns that I hope we might clarify here in the next few weeks until June, when we finish with the spring session.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I recognize the Member for Calgary-Shaw, followed by Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have great pleasure to rise and speak on second reading of Bill 25, the Children First Act. I want to thank the minister for bringing this forward. I do truly believe, as other members previous have noted, that his intent here is pure, to make sure that children in our province are given the best environment in which to grow up and to thrive.

There's a quote that I want to share with the House that I often reflect back on, and that is one that was given to us by the leader of the native American Squamish tribe, Chief Seattle, who said, "We do not inherit the earth from our ancestors; we borrow it from our children." I know that that's more of an environmental lens to look at things through, but I also use that in my day-to-day life as a father. You know, my role here is not just to look at what has been given to me, but it is to make sure that for children and for my son in particular I as a father do everything that I can to make sure that the world he grows up in and becomes a part of is the best one possible for him, Mr. Speaker.

The reality is that our children are our future. It's both how and why we exist and why everything that we do as a society is focused on creating an environment that is favourable for our children to thrive and succeed and go on and lead productive lives in. Many children are blessed with the support of loving families, and unfortunately many also are not. The Ministry of Human Services is in a unique position and is, unfortunately, responsible for dealing with some of the most horrific cases of neglect and abuse. It falls on the minister's shoulders and his staff to come up with the appropriate solutions to minimize those situations when they do happen and to make corrections where they can and, with legislation, to ensure that we minimize these situations.

You know, protecting all children, both in and out of care, is, again, the paramount thing that both parents and foster parents can do, that child service workers and this government can do. It is incumbent upon them to do that, recognizing that it's not just about raising children. It's about raising adults – they are all going to grow up one day – and ensuring that those children, as they grow up, are in a position where they, too, can turn around and restore that and return that favour to their own children and make sure that they provide a safe and stable environment, strong enough to raise children of their own in.

I do believe that there are many positives in this bill. The sharing of information, from what I understand from the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek during her time as the minister for child services, was a major obstacle for that department back then. In listening yesterday to the chief of the Calgary police force, Rick Hanson, at the press conference where the minister unveiled the bill, talk about, you know, when they were doing the debrief, how if they had had certain pieces of information from other stakeholders or other agencies involved that had that information, they would have been able to take corrective action to stop some of the tragedies that we've heard about.

5:10

I do believe that there is plenty of support amongst many of the stakeholders for this bill and for that sharing of information, but I also believe that there is a very good reason why we have an

independent officer of this Legislature in the Information and Privacy Commissioner. Her role is to make sure that we follow the three acts that guide freedom of information, whether it be PIPA or the Health Information Act, and it is somewhat of an alarm when she sends out a press release on the day after this bill has been tabled in the Legislature that flags some pretty major holes in what she sees as issues based on this legislation potentially having, I guess, disagreements with current legislation.

I think that speaks to one of the reasons why the pace in which this bill is being brought forward is unfortunate. It would be much more comfortable for me – I truly want to support this legislation. I do believe that I will ultimately support it, but I would much rather be able to hear from the Information and Privacy Commissioner directly to hear and understand actually what those concerns are and what we can do as legislators and in this bill to make sure that we're still, I guess, finding ways and means for both of these goals, which are, again, the sharing of information in the best interests of children but doing so without impacting and negatively impacting other people's privacy.

It's a welcome change that people in these agencies would no longer have to necessarily fear that they're in violation of these acts and that that sharing of information can happen, but, again, I think that when you get a press release with five very specific notes on it from the very commissioner, who is independent of this Legislature, waving red flags, that is probably something we should pay attention to.

I'm happy to see that the minister has looked to remove the word "wilfully" from the sections of the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act, the Protection of Sexually Exploited Children Act, and the Drug-endangered Children Act. It sort of fits our tough-on-crime agenda, the things that we've been talking about here in this House. I like and fully support the minister's position to remove this word that changes the legislation, which essentially would allow that any person who causes a child to be in need of intervention or in need of protection from being sexually exploited or who causes a child to be drug endangered becomes guilty of an offence. For you lawyerly types in the room I'll use your Latin *mens rea*. The removal of that I think will go a long way to help ensure that when these interventions are required, the people responsible for putting these children in danger are held responsible for it.

I'm also happy to see some clarification around the victims of crime fund, Mr. Speaker, and what I would probably call the Little Warriors clause. There has been quite a bit of discussion in this House about that organization and some of the financial support it's requested from the government. I was happy to see that the minister is looking to clarify within this act that for agencies that are trying to protect children – it makes it more clear that this would be an avenue where they could go and apply for funding from the victims of crime fund.

I'm on the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices, as you are, Mr. Speaker. When the Child and Youth Advocate came to see us and discussed with us some of the amendments that he would like to see in the legislation that governs his office and his body, again, I was fully in support of those, as was our committee. I believe we unanimously chose to support him as he came in and was able to express to the committee why he felt that he could use these increased powers.

It's one of those unintended consequences in legislation that sometimes, like this, it may have been passed a little bit too quickly, without the proper due diligence. As a result of that unintended consequence or lack of due diligence, there has been a case or cases that he has been unable to intervene in. He's been unable to testify in a court or basically state his opinion of the

facts. It's had a negative impact on his role, and I'm happy that we're seeing some changes in here as per his request that will allow him to fully advocate, as others across the country in his role have the opportunity to do.

I know that there are members in the Chamber that are quite uncomfortable with allowing our front-line social workers to use their training and empowering them to make decisions without necessarily having to climb the bureaucratic ladder. I can share their concern and hope that the minister does regulate just how much power those individuals will have and the situations in which they will be allowed to exercise that training. I think that speeding up the decision-making process in the child intervention world, in child services, which could also directly impact the ability of the Crown to protect vulnerable children, is a positive step. Again, I would like to express the sense of trepidation that I do have about the degree of power we may be granting them, and I look forward to some fruitful discussion during Committee of the Whole about what exactly the minister's intention is with that.

I think giving foster parents the authority to make day-to-day decisions is another positive step. We have, you know, foster parents who truly — many of them deeply care about these individuals, and they want to be able to give them an environment that is as close to a home as they can possibly know under the circumstances, and this is just one more step that allows for those children who find themselves in that situation to truly have that sense of home and sense of family. I think it's going to make things much easier for the foster parents as well.

I'm happy to see the recognition of interprovincial and interjurisdictional family violence protection orders. It doesn't make a lot of sense to me, Mr. Speaker, that an individual in a neighbouring province or any province for that matter could have a restraining order against someone, they could move to Alberta, and that restraining order is null and void based on the fact that they crossed an imaginary line. I think that this is, again, a positive step forward, and I thank the minister for including it.

The overall intent to protect children, particularly those in harm's way, is admirable, and it should be supported by every party. There are some areas I will need some convincing on. I know that the minister is very passionate about creating his frameworks, and it reminded me during the briefing that we had on this bill of one of the more famous scenes from the movie *Jerry Maguire*, where Tom Cruise walks in at the ends and says: "You complete me." I truly believe that the minister, when thinking about having a new project, a new charter, a new framework to create, felt that this is going to add some completion. I'm saying it in jest and in good fun, Minister, and I hope you can take it that way.

I do sincerely appreciate the offer of the minister to include the opposition party in the creation of the charter, and I take what I see in here as just a general working framework as to what that is going to include. I don't think that it's a bad thing. I do believe that we see some very specific language in here that is a direct result of the social policy framework. It is what Albertans generally told this minister through that process, and I think that they see that in this act.

Another one of the things that I have a bit of a problem with, Mr. Speaker, is around the family violence death review committee reports. I believe that striking the committee is absolutely the right thing to do. I think that there's been a lot of positive that's been seen out of doing this similarly in Ontario. I believe five years ago they implemented something like this. I think it compounds the tragedy if we have a domestic violence situation where a death has occurred, and if we don't actually

learn from it, then shame on us. Again, I believe that it's the right thing to do.

My problem with this and the way in which the wording is in the act is around the three reports. My understanding is that there will be a report that is completely confidential, that has a number of the details that the public does not need to know. A second report will be a public report. And a third report will be an annual report tabled here in the Legislature. My main concern is around that public report and the fact that based on the wording in the act, the minister can withhold that public report if he or she so chooses. I don't think that that's necessarily my definition of public. So, again, I look forward to having that discussion with the minister during the committee process as to what exactly would prevent him from releasing that report.

5:20

It's interesting to see this government, again, who ran on — you know, the leadership of the Premier. When she secured the leadership, she talked about slowing the legislative process down. I understand that a lot of the girth, as it were, of this bill is in consequential amendments, but at the end of the day it's also a very important piece of legislation, and I think the minister can appreciate that. I think it's incumbent upon us to get it right. Because this Earth and what we have here is on loan from our children, I think that it goes without saying that we need to have as a Legislature and as legislators the ability to look at this with more clarity, to get more clarity on what the Information and Privacy Commissioner has flagged for us here today.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I would like to table a notice of amendment in which I would move that

Bill 25, Children First Act, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Families and Communities in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. We'll just let that be circulated.

Hon. members, this amendment will be referred to as amendment RA1.

I'll recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw. You have about a minute and a half left.

Mr. Wilson: I will make it quick, then, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

As suggested earlier, I think that this piece of legislation is so vital that it's a shame not to include everyone in the process. I believe that what we have in the Families and Communities Committee would allow for this bill to be properly dissected, for some public consultation to happen, for all parties to ask our stakeholders to have feedback and to do the due diligence that I know the minister has done himself. I just don't, quite frankly, feel like we're doing our jobs by getting a bill and having less than 24 hours to call stakeholders, to be able to properly look at it, to propose amendments to strengthen it. That being said, I think that rushing significant legislation like this is, quite frankly, an example of how not to govern.

I would ask all members to support this referral motion. Thank you for your consideration.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Speaking to the amendment, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Is there 29(2)(a) on this?

The Deputy Speaker: There is 29(2)(a).

Mr. Mason: Okay. Thank you very much. Well, then, I would like to ask the hon. member what types of things he thinks the committee needs to consider. For example, we've received the information from the Privacy Commissioner raising a number of concerns. Do you feel that that is something the committee should consider? Should we hear from the public on this matter? I guess I would note that when this same minister was the Education minister, there was extensive consultation on the Education Act, but this is being fast-tracked very quickly, and it has a broad, broad effect on families and children. Do you feel that the committee should perhaps hold public hearings?

Mr. Wilson: Great. I'd like to thank the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood for the question. To start with one of the items that he flagged, the news release from the Information and Privacy Commissioner, I wholeheartedly believe that we need to have the opportunity to ask her about her opinion. I recognize the fact that the minister has met with her, and they've negotiated extensively around this. I also recognize that many of these concerns are the same roadblocks that the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek ran into when she was minister many years ago.

It doesn't change the fact that I do believe that having the opportunity to gain clarity on what her concerns are and making sure that we do what we can – I mean, she's also kindly put in here that at the very least she has a couple of amendments that she would like to see to the bill. I think that it would be far more productive and far more, I guess, in fashion and more respectful to what we do here to have the opportunity for various parties and various individuals to directly question her on what these concerns are and what we can do to address them and then pass this legislation knowing full well that we can meet both of these ends.

I do also believe that public hearings may be worth while. I don't see any reason why we shouldn't be doing this. If this is, again, such an important piece of legislation and building the children's charter is something that the minister is set on doing, then I think that it's almost incumbent upon us to make sure that we get public input on something along these lines.

Quite frankly, when the minister I believe yesterday suggested that he wanted to get through Committee of the Whole the day after tabling a bill this size, I don't believe that it truly respected the process.

Mr. Hancock: I never said that.

Mr. Wilson: I'm happy to hear that that process may be changed. Fair enough. I will withdraw that comment. I'm happy to hear that we do not have to go into Committee of the Whole tonight on this bill.

That said, I think that the committees that are struck by this Legislature, the all-party committees, are meant to do that. They are meant to examine legislation, and I think that we should exercise that right.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

There is still time left. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Great. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the hon. member's comments. I wanted to get a little bit of clarification from him. He referred to some members having issue with responsibility for the front-line staff. The hon. member had made a comment that it's front-line social workers, but what needs to be clarified is that in this bill it's talking about child intervention workers, not social workers. Social workers are

trained, have certification, are qualified. There's a licensing body. There's an overseeing body of social workers. Child intervention worker is not defined. It's unclear. We have no idea what the training is. I was just wondering if that affects the hon. member's thoughts or position on this bill bestowing powers and authority to these child intervention workers who could have no qualifications or little or no certification or formal training in this area.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question and giving me time to respond. I think that this is just another reason why this needs to go to committee so that everybody can be perfectly clear on what it is that this bill is going to do and what it's going to allow for. I would be very interested, for example, for the College of Social Workers to come and talk to us about what it means to them and other stakeholders who have a complete grasp of what the positive and negative implications could be.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Hon. members, we will now have debate on the amendment. I'll recognize the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased that the hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw has made this amendment. I was waiting for just a moment to see if we were going to get a response from the minister on this, so I'll try and provoke one, then, if I can. I would rather be responding to the hon. minister once I know his position on whether or not this should be referred, but I certainly think it should be. I am very surprised at the haste with which this bill has been put forward. It's part of a bigger picture of haste on a number of bills. I don't know what sort of arrangements the Government House Leader has made with the Official Opposition, but I do know that our request to speak and have time to prepare amendments on other bills has not been responded to by the Government House Leader. I also know that bills have been put through over our objections, and we've not been informed that they were going to be dealt with; for example, Bill 21 last night.

5:30

I want to say that, from our point of view, the degree of co-operation that we're going to afford this government going forward in the last days of this session is going to be extremely limited. We have up until this time found the Government House Leader to conduct himself with integrity in a general sense, but we have found that that has been completely absent in the last few days, and we are very disappointed in those actions. We may be a small caucus, but we're a mighty caucus, Mr. Speaker.

I want to say that I think this particular bill should be referred to committee, as put forward in the motion, and it should be subject to public hearings. This is a bill with broad-reaching implications for families and for children, and there has been very little consultation with respect to this. It's odd to me that the minister, who in previous incarnations, for example as the Education minister with the Education Act, was going to consult till the cows came home, until people were sick of him coming around and knocking at their door: what do you think about my bill? That was the kind of stuff that was happening. It was consultation ad nauseam. In this case, we see a very different story. We see a much different situation, a bill that has many problems, from our perspective.

I know that some of our other colleagues in the Official Opposition don't have problems with the principles of this bill, but we do. We think that it deserves a lot of discussion and that it needs to be debated thoroughly in this House. Opposition parties need time to study it, to do their own consultations with different organizations, to prepare amendments, and so on. Some of those courtesies, indeed I would say rights of opposition parties have been trampled on by this minister acting as the official Government House Leader in the last few days, and we're not prepared to let that happen again. I want to say that this is worrisome legislation. We do need to talk to the public about it. I think there should be public hearings. I think we need to hear from people.

You know, kids matter. The minister loves to wear a little lapel pin. He's got one on right now. It says Children First. Well, this bill doesn't put children first. If this bill really puts children first, it would make sure that we talked to families around the province, that we talked to organizations that deal with children in all sorts of circumstances, including children who come from troubled families and have various sets of challenges.

Now, in the Premier's leadership campaign she stated that she would "require all government departments to conduct detailed program reviews and demonstrate why programs and services cannot be delivered by community-based organizations or the private sector." She further committed "to identify services that can be transferred to community leadership or privatized." Now, Mr. Speaker, we are on record in the areas of health care and education that those are public services, paid for by the taxpayers, and they need to be delivered publicly as well. The same goes double, in our view, for children's services.

What's happened is that the Premier has been targeting supports for the most vulnerable Albertans. Despite all the promises, all the great rhetoric in the campaign, all the promises that were made about eliminating child poverty in five years and so on, we haven't seen a single piece of evidence that this government is actually prepared to do anything about that. In fact, they've made major cuts to the supports of children living in poverty. I think that's shameful, Mr. Speaker, and this government needs to be held accountable on that. They can't run an election promising to eliminate child poverty, then completely ignore it in the throne speech, and then in the first budget after the election make multimillion-dollar cuts to the programs that would help those children.

We've seen the social policy framework and in that case the minister's epic consultation process, which concluded with exactly what the Premier wanted, and that is to download services to communities and private companies. On page 17 of the social policy framework it says that the government will move from its role as a funder to a new role as influencer, convener, and partner. Well, isn't that nice, Mr. Speaker? What nice things to say about the role of the government in dealing with children, particularly children who need help, who are in poverty. If they think that they can be an influencer, convener, and partner and cut supports to children's services and that's going to end child poverty, then they are dreaming in 3-D.

We are in the midst of results-based budgeting, which has tire company and lumber executives reviewing all program dollars on early child development and supports with Albertans with disabilities. We have the Premier's swath of broken promises, including her commitment in 2011 to eliminate child poverty in five years, and we have the Premier's budget, which was an unprecedented attack on Alberta's families and children: no commitments, no follow-through on the promise for full-day kindergarten; cuts to public schools, including elimination of

AISI; cuts to busing; cuts to the education system support; learning resources cut in half; and there's a cut to the Alberta child health benefit.

The STEP program, by which many community organizations are able to deliver services within the community that benefit kids, that benefit families and benefit communities, has been eliminated. We've seen cuts to family supports for children with disabilities and to youth in transition. We've seen major cuts to postsecondary institutions. The biggest cuts of all come to our universities and our colleges. We've seen cuts to income support for learners and health benefits to learners. That's this Premier's record so far, Mr. Speaker, cuts to the important things that people need.

Now we have the Children First Act, that wants to engage in a mandatory review process of all government services and programs for kids in order to streamline and consolidate, all of this without consultation, all of this rammed through in the middle of the night if this minister has his way. It's just more code for this Premier's right-wing agenda of downloading, off-loading, and privatization of the most vital supports for vulnerable Albertans.

You know, you have to wonder where we start with this legislation, and I'm outlining some of those just to illustrate and underline the need for public consultation and to support the motion of referral that's been made.

Here's a serious problem: providing statutory authority for children in care to child intervention workers, the front-line staff, as opposed to the director of child, youth, and family enhancement. This is a serious concern to the workers on the front lines and the stakeholders that we've had a chance to talk to just briefly over the phone. They're very worried about this change.

It stems from a well-publicized court case in 2009 where the director was found personally in contempt of court. The Hon. Mr. Justice Jean Côté in his ruling described the child intervention system as a complex administrative structure and, according to the evidence he saw, "must exacerbate opacity and the opportunities for deniability." The government argued that the judge's view of the law would necessitate restructuring the whole child protection administration, and this bill is a clear response to that case. It is a restructuring of the entire system.

Mr. Speaker, there are lots of other things that I think we could talk about that are bad with this bill, but the point that I want to make is that something so important as the children of our province needs to have legislation, a government, and a minister that care about them. That means talking to Albertans. That means talking to Alberta families.

5:40

There are a wide range of views, and these views are reflected in this Chamber. We don't all have the same view of families or the role of the government in children's lives, but I think that we all benefit from a thorough discussion of those different ideas and different approaches, which hasn't happened with this bill. This is a top-down approach, top-down decision-making that will set in place very specific ways of dealing with children in our province. By not talking to the public, by not listening to the front-line staff, by not listening to families, I think that the minister has done a disservice. I think that the government has done a disservice. It's fine to pass legislation, but I think it's very important as well that the government be held to account for its other decisions, which I've outlined with respect to cuts that existed in the budget, contrasting those with the promises that were made by the Premier in the last election.

I believe that this government has done more to limit debate. The Premier made another promise, Mr. Speaker, in the election,

and that is to recognize and value the role of the opposition. It has done absolutely the opposite since the election. That speaks to the need to have this matter referred to committee to give the opposition as well as government members a chance to participate in the process of shaping the legislation. I think the promise that was made is probably one of the hollowest that I've seen. If the Premier thought she could put opposition members to work in committees and create lots of busy work so that we couldn't do our job as opposition, she's mistaken. The opposition in all parties has been very effective in this session and will continue to be despite the attempts of the government to limit our ability to do our job.

Whether it's limiting debate on the budget or trying to ram through bills in the middle of the night, this government is less democratic and has behaved in a less democratic way than any of the previous governments that I've seen. I mean, it's all the same government, but they like to divide themselves into different governments by leaders so that they don't have to take responsibility for what happened with the last leader.

I've been here for a little while now, Mr. Speaker. I've worked across from three Premiers, and I have to say that this Premier is less open to the opposition, more likely to ram things through, more likely to trample on the rights of the Assembly than either of the other two Premiers with whom I've had the opportunity to work. I've seen a real deterioration in how they present financial information, how they debate the budget. You know, we've seen different rules in different committees for the opposition, limiting the opposition's time to ask questions on the budget, limiting our ability to debate the budget through various nefarious tricks devised by the Government House Leader.

I think that in general we can turn a page, Mr. Speaker. We can turn a page by supporting this motion, by taking substantial pieces of legislation and referring them to committees, taking them out to the public so that the public can get a better sense of what's in the legislation and could respond before we have votes, before we go in the middle of the night and push through important pieces of legislation. I think that that would be an excellent course for us to take.

Thank you for that.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, I believe 29(2)(a) will be available after the second speaker. Based on the ruling by Speaker Kowalski, there will be 29(2)(a) available after the second speaker. [interjection] Okay. I've been corrected.

Standing Order 29(2)(a). The Government House Leader did catch my eye. Did you want to speak?

Mr. Hancock: No. I want to speak to the motion.

The Deputy Speaker: To the motion. Okay.

Standing Order 29(2)(a). The Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll be very brief. Throughout his whole speech I'm not sure if the leader of the New Democratic opposition really had the opportunity to fully articulate how he felt. I am just wondering, with respect to this motion that was put forward by the Member for Calgary-Shaw, if he could actually highlight the main points that he has in favour of this motion. I just want to ask him if he can further elaborate in his articulation of the reasons he's supporting it.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, just to remind you that this section is intended for brief comments and responses, not to extend debate. Please proceed.

Mr. Mason: I didn't know that, Mr. Speaker. That's the first time I've heard that.

Well, let me just quickly say that I think all of us benefit by more democracy rather than less. The government is doing a poor job. If the government is in trouble with voters, if the government is scared, they will want less democracy, and they will want less openness. Every PC government I've ever seen always campaigns on more openness and transparency, yet it gets a little darker every day.

An Hon. Member: You need to get your eyes checked.

Mr. Mason: Hon. member, through the chair.

In my view, what we need to do is to open up the windows. We need to open up the doors. We need to let the public know what's going on. They need to be able to have input, and they need to have the opportunity to hold the government accountable. I'm confident that if we do that, we'll have better government.

Even with this crew, hon. member, if we had more democracy, more openness and transparency in a real sense rather than just meaningless campaign promises, they could become a better government. I think it's actually possible, and we should try and encourage them to do that, to become a better government by accepting that more openness and transparency is good for them. It's tough medicine for this government, but I think they'd feel better if they'd actually listen to the public once.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to our leader of the New Democrats, the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. In the fullness of time, usually when we receive bills, especially substantive bills – I seem to recall from the time that I was here before to now when we had the opportunity to do something very valuable, and that was to get out and consult with stakeholders. I shouldn't doubt that the government did do some of that work when they produced this bill, but I just wanted to ask the member what sorts of stakeholders – if we had some time to actually do this properly, how does that bear fruit to help to create good legislation that benefits the most people? I was just curious.

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you very much for that question. I think there is probably a whole slew of organizations that we could be talking to, and many organizations – not-for-profit organizations, community organizations, as well as professional associations – have a very strong, rich experience dealing with children and some of the issues that sometimes face children who are in more challenging circumstances. But I think that just listening to parents, just giving an opportunity for teachers and front-line workers and families to have input to this would be very interesting.

I've represented a part of Edmonton that is a lower income area for over 20 years both on city council and as an MLA, and I've visited some schools in my constituency and some in other areas as well. The struggles that the teachers have. Sometimes kids come in at about 10 o'clock.

5:50

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I'll recognize the hon. Government House Leader, speaking to the amendment.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do want to speak to the amendment. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood when he got up indicated that he wanted to be provocative. I had every intention of speaking to the amendment anyway because it does give me an opportunity again to respond to some of the issues that have been raised, but I want to indicate to the House that I don't think it's very appropriate for someone – it's very appropriate for a member to be provocative, and I always enjoy the provocation that comes from the hon. member. I find it offensive when he attacks my integrity. I have always considered . . .

The Deputy Speaker: A point of order has been noted at 5:51. I guess we should deal with that now.

Hon. member, do you have a citation for your point of order?

Mr. Mason: Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j).

The Deputy Speaker: Proceed, hon. member, to speak to your point of order.

Point of Order Scheduling Government Business

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, you know, I think at this point we need to put on the record that with respect to Bill 21, first of all, we were not told that it would be dealt with last night. It was not in the communication or part of the agreement that was made, okay? So that's the first piece.

The House leader for the New Democrat opposition sent a note to the Government House Leader asking that it not be dealt with. I'm going to allow my House leader now to fill you in on the rest of the details.

The Deputy Speaker: Well, hon. member, if I may, I think that's the reason we have an amendment, because the amendment spoke to the whole idea of trying to move this into another place to allow more time. The point you have raised now is suggesting that your caucus did not have the opportunity to deal with this. I really can't see the point of order, hon. member.

I think we're going to proceed. We're going to let the Government House Leader carry on. That's exactly the content of the amendment that we're dealing with, hon. member, with all due respect.

Proceed, hon. Government House Leader.

Debate Continued

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you. I do want to get this in while the hon. member is here to hear it. The fact of the matter is that he did challenge my integrity by raising in discussion that they may not have time to have discussions around bills because they're rushed through. Yet Bill 21 was on the Order Paper last night, it was on Projected Government Business, and it was called. The hon. member was here, and if he'd had any objection to the thing proceeding, he could have stood up and said so and did not.

Mr. Mason: I sent you a note.

Mr. Hancock: It's not on the record that he said that. He sent me a note, but I don't get everything. I don't look at everything because I've got all sorts of things happening. [interjections] Things were happening very quickly.

My point is that there are important things to debate in this bill, and the hon. member chose to attack my integrity rather than bringing forward his vast experience, 15 years in the House, although he didn't even know the rule for raising a point of order.

That being said, this an important bill, and this is a bill that does bear discussion. I am one of those who actually was keen on getting legislative policy committees, now standing committees, into the rules and referring bills to those committees for productive discussion. I'm a member, as I think has been acknowledged, as the hon. member said, that consults bills ad nauseam.

I want to say two things on this particular amendment. First of all, it's a little premature. We're at the debate stage where we're talking about the principles of the bill. Others may disagree with me on this, but I think the principles of the bill are important to debate and pass, and then if we want to refer it to a committee rather than dealing with it in Committee of the Whole here, that's another discussion. As to what should be in the bill and whether certain things are handled in the bill in an appropriate way and those sorts of things, that could possibly be something for discussion before a committee, either in the House or a legislative policy committee. But I think we can come to some agreement as to whether the principles of the bill are the ones we want before we send it to the committee to do that further study. That's one point, and that's why I won't be supporting this amendment.

The second point is with respect to consultation. Two points. First of all, I can assure the House that I spent a considerable amount of time in January, February, and March meeting with stakeholder groups. Not every stakeholder across the province, obviously – and we certainly didn't put up the website that we did on the social policy framework discussion – but we have had considerable discussion with groups that are involved with families. Evidence of that is the some 17 to 25 representatives of many of those groups, not all of them, who are here because they are excited about this bill coming forward. They are excited about what we've been doing. They acknowledged yesterday publicly that what we've put into this bill reflects what they asked us to do.

I didn't go out and say: "I'm going to have a Children First Act. What would you like in it?" I went out and said, "How can we frame a discussion around children in an appropriate way, and what are the things that we could move on immediately to show direction and action while we're continuing the discussion over a longer period of time over the other things we should do?" The review process that's built into the bill provides the opportunity for us to look at everything we're doing and to review everything we're doing.

The FOIP review that was promised in the throne speech will allow a thorough review of the FOIP Act, but there are things we need to do now in the best interest of children. It's been very clear from all of the stakeholders – and the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek acknowledged that we have been trying to do some of this information sharing stuff for a long time. I can say that there have been discussions between our department and the Privacy Commissioner's office, and we made some changes to the wording in the act to try and accommodate the concerns that were being raised by them. I'm disappointed in the news release, to be perfectly frank, because it was my view that we had accommodated all of the issues that were raised. But we can get into that discussion.

I would encourage members to think about the fact that we are having a discussion now, and we will be going out and having discussions about poverty and poverty reduction. I've made that public, and we're going to be doing that. We are going to be talking about the family violence tragedy, and there will be

consultation on that. In fact, virtually every piece that's in here is going to be the subject of some very thorough discussion. But I would suggest that we ought not hold up the good, low-hanging fruit, if I can call it that, that's in this bill, the things that we can do now to make things better now while we discuss the additional things that we can do to make it better. If we've made a mistake in this – and that's quite possible – then we can always come back and fix it with that discussion.

We do need to empower front-end workers, properly qualified, which is why we define them in the bill as child intervention workers, and then put a regulation-making authority as to what the qualifications need to be before a person is delegated the authority to make that front-end decision. That's an important piece because you do need qualified people to make those decisions.

But we do not need the whole of our bureaucracy – and I don't use bureaucracy in a bad way – to be available to slow down processes and the decision-making that needs to be made on a more urgent basis by people who are qualified to do it at the front end of the system. We certainly don't need it to go up the line to the director to determine whether a child should be allowed to go on a field trip for school, particularly if a foster child is in a family with other children and the other children are going to the same

school and dad can sign their forms or mom can sign their forms but can't sign the form for the foster child. How does that make the child feel in the family? We don't need to hold that up. We can start doing that now.

I find it really ironic that those members – I was going to call them the third party, but I think they've been demoted to fourth – would get up day after day saying that we're not taking any action. Then when we take action, they say that we're going too fast, that we've got to slow down, and that we ought to consult some more. That's really ironic. So to attack my integrity, and then be totally inconsistent in their comments and framework about what we should do and how we should do it: that's really ironic.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood has provoked me. I always thought he was an honourable guy and, quite frankly, a friend. Then he gets up and challenges my integrity over stuff that he should know well . . .

The Deputy Speaker: I hate to interrupt you, hon. Government House Leader, but it is 6 o'clock. The House stands adjourned until 7:30 tonight.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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