

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Thursday, March 3, 2005

1:30 p.m.

Date: 20050303

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon and welcome. I would ask members to remain standing after prayers so that we may pay tribute to our former colleagues who have passed away since we were last in the House.

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

Mr. Roderick MacLeod
August 3, 1908, to June 8, 2004

The Speaker: Hon. members, Mr. Roderick MacLeod passed away on June 8, 2004, at the age of 95 years. Mr. MacLeod was first elected in the by-election held February 9, 1959, and served until June 17, 1963. During his years of service he represented the constituency of Olds for the Social Credit Party. Mr. MacLeod served on the following select standing committees during his term of office: Agriculture, Colonization, Immigration and Education; Municipal Law; Public Accounts; and Railways, Telephones and Irrigation.

Mr. Percy Wickman
June 10, 1941, to July 3, 2004

The Speaker: Mr. Percy Wickman passed away on July 3, 2004, at the age of 63 years. Mr. Wickman was first elected to represent the Liberal Party for the 22nd Legislature, March 20, 1989, representing the Edmonton-Whitemud constituency. He was re-elected June 15, 1993, for the 23rd Legislature and March 11, 1997, for the 24th Legislature to represent the Edmonton-Rutherford constituency. Mr. Wickman served on the select standing committees on Law and Regulations; Private Bills; Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing; and on the Public Affairs Committee. He also served on the special select standing committees on Members' Services and Parliamentary Reform.

Mr. Euell Montgomery
November 9, 1915, to October 9, 2004

The Speaker: Mr. Euell Montgomery passed away on Saturday, October 9, 2004, at the age of 88 years. Mr. Montgomery was first elected in a by-election on October 26, 1961, and served until May 23, 1967. During his years of service he represented the constituency of Peace River for the Social Credit governing party. During his years in the Legislature Mr. Montgomery served on the select standing committees on Agriculture, Colonization, Immigration and Education; Municipal Law; Municipal Law and Law Amendments; Railways, Telephones and Irrigation; Public Accounts; Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing; and on Public Affairs.

Mr. Stanley N. Ruzycki
December 31, 1915, to October 15, 2004

The Speaker: Mr. Stanley N. Ruzycki passed away on Friday, October 15, 2004, at the age of 88 years. Mr. Ruzycki was first elected on June 29, 1955, and served until June 18, 1959. During his

years of service he represented the constituency of Vegreville for the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation, also known as the CCF. During his years in the Legislature Mr. Ruzycki served on the select standing committees on Agriculture, Colonization, Immigration and Education; Railways, Telephones and Irrigation; and Private Bills.

Our prayers are with them. With our admiration and respect there is gratitude to members of their families, who shared the burdens of public office. Members of Roderick MacLeod's, Percy Wickman's, Euell Montgomery's, and Stanley Ruzycki's families are with us today in the Speaker's gallery.

In a moment of silent prayer I ask you to remember hon. members Roderick MacLeod, Percy Wickman, Euell Montgomery, and Stanley Ruzycki as you may have known them. Rest eternal grant unto them, O Lord, and let light perpetual shine upon them. Amen.

Hon. members, beginning today, as we go through 2005 and the early parts of 2006, I'm going to provide hon. members with an historical vignette from the history of the province of Alberta. On this day in 1930 the first prairie mail service by air began in the city of Edmonton.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Visitors**

The Speaker: Hon. members, it's an honour for me to rise today to introduce you to guests who are seated in the Speaker's gallery. These guests are family members of our former colleagues.

The family of Mr. Roderick MacLeod, former MLA for the constituency of Olds, is represented by his sons Mr. Colin MacLeod and Dr. Rod MacLeod. If they would rise, please.

Mrs. Silvia Wickman, widow of Mr. Percy Wickman, former MLA for the constituency of Edmonton-Whitemud, is here with family friend Mr. Ed Wrynn.

Former MLA Mr. Euell Montgomery, of the Peace River constituency, is represented by his nephew Doug and his wife, Alberta Montgomery, niece Mrs. Myrtle Hueppelsheuser, great-niece Dawn Sigurdson, and friends Vern and Gail Machon.

Mrs. Anne Ruzycki, wife of Stanley Ruzycki, former MLA for the constituency of Vegreville, is here with daughter Marilyn Ruzycki and family friend Marvin Bloski.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a number of guests from Alberta Finance, who are here as part of a public service orientation tour. I would ask them to stand as I read out their names: Balkar Dusanj, Bashar Dari, Boris Dudas, Bronwen Thompson, Christine Loiselle, Jasmine L'Heureux, Joffre Hotz, John Yu, Jon Hill, Kevin Pengelly, Laura Zavicsa, Lori White, Louise Devaney, Melissa Strong, Nicola Sargeant, Robert Hoy, Sam Wong, Tracey Rittering, Tyler Foote, Waldemar Kuras. I would ask that all members welcome our guests to the House.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

Mr. Stelmach: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly a constituent of Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, a long-time employee of Alberta Transportation, marking more than 35 years, Mr. Barry Campbell, seated in the members' gallery. I would ask Mr. Barry Campbell to rise and receive the traditional applause of the Assembly.

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

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislature someone who has travelled all the way from Calgary to be with us this afternoon. This is someone who took action where she saw a need to do so. She did so out of caring and compassion and a belief in the need to stick up for the rights of those who cannot adequately fend for themselves. I would like to recognize and thank Carol Weatherdon for her effort. She gathered over 4,000 names of Albertans who support an increase in the AISH benefit and a commitment from this government to renew that benefit annually. I would ask that our honoured guest please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Ms Haley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege for me to be able to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly today 14 constituents from my constituency accompanied by their teacher, Mr. Dean Hughes. There are 14 students with him today from grade 10, and they attend the Airdrie Koinonia Christian school. I'd just like to commend them on once again being one of the top schools in Alberta for marks, according to our achievement tests. They deserve incredible congratulations for that. They have a very small, humble school, and they work really hard. It's just an awesome place. I'd ask if they could please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Ducharme: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly nine very bright students from the J.F. Dion school from the Fishing Lake Métis settlement in the Bonnyville-Cold Lake constituency. They are accompanied today by teachers Miss Kathryn Walmsley and Miss Rhonda LaBoucane and helper Mr. Shaun Anderson. They have been here all this week, and they have been participants at all the festivities that have taken place this week. They've also been very active in the program that you offer, School at the Legislature. I'd ask my guests to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure to introduce a man who wears a lot of hats. Today the hat he's wearing is as co-chair of Edmonton Salutes, a body that liaises our civilians with military and shows them the due respect that they indeed deserve. I would ask Mr. Bart West to rise and accept the warm, customary welcome of this Assembly.

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly two distinguished constituents, Dr. Olga Kemp and Dr. Hélène Narayana. Dr. Olga Kemp was born in Nordegg, Alberta. She has a PhD in French literature from the University of British Columbia. She lives in my constituency, Edmonton-Strathcona, and her family home, known as Margaret Martin House, which was built in 1907 and where her mother lived for 50 years, is being considered for historical designation by both the city of Edmonton and the province of Alberta.

The second guest, Mr. Speaker, is Dr. Hélène Narayana, who is a

physicist by background and education. She's a long-time social and environmental activist and a former broadcaster with the CBC French network. These distinguished guests are seated in the public gallery, and I would now ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of honour this afternoon to introduce to you a number of very powerful Liberal supporters seated in the public gallery. Through you I would like to have the Assembly give them the warmest possible welcome: Ms Kieran Leblanc, who is with the Alberta Liberal Party; Mr. David Cournoyer, who works with us in the Liberal Party; Mr. Bruce Dean; and several others that are up there as well. Please have all members give them the warmest possible welcome.

Thank you.

Ministerial Statements

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Border Closure to Canadian Beef

Mr. Klein: Thank you. If you'll allow, I'd like to take this opportunity to congratulate all members of this Assembly on their elections or re-elections, including you, Mr. Speaker. As this spring session begins, I know that all members feel honoured to serve their province as legislators and will take their responsibilities seriously.

Today, Mr. Speaker, I rise to talk about yesterday's development in the ongoing struggle to restore the full strength and prosperity of the Canadian beef industry. Yesterday, as we all know, a Montana court brought down a temporary injunction to prevent the expected reopening of the U.S. border to Canadian beef next Monday. The injunction was granted at the request of a lobby group in the U.S., to be specific R-CALF, I believe. The decision undoubtedly was a blow to the hopes that ranchers and producers have carefully held for the last two years, it was a blow to the excitement that was growing around the expected border opening next week, and it was a blow to every Albertan whose livelihood depends on an open border.

But this is not the time for us to give up. Over the last two years Alberta's beef producers have shown the world what they are made of. They are strong, they are resilient, they are innovative, and they are resourceful, and they have made Albertans proud. These men and women don't give up fighting for what they believe is right, and there is no question that getting that border reopened is the right thing. It's right for beef producers and consumers on both sides of the border, and, Mr. Speaker, it will happen.

Today I want to assure Albertans that this government is pledged to doing whatever it can, whatever it needs to do in order to speed the process along. Our Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development is meeting with federal and provincial counterparts to develop a national response. He's in Ottawa as I speak. As well, the minister has instructed his department experts to continue working with Alberta producers on further steps to be taken to get the industry fully back on its feet.

Under the recovery plan announced by this government last year, expanded slaughter capacity is being developed right here in Alberta. We're working with industry on market and project development, work that has already led to over a dozen new Alberta-made beef products hitting the markets. Improved income support programs for producers are in place, programs designed to keep the

overall cattle market running. Just this week the government announced that almost \$40 million is being allocated to a prion research project. That project, of course, is to help better understand how BSE is spread and how to control the disease in livestock.

But we're not going to stop there. Given yesterday's court injunction, I will meet with the minister and others involved, my colleagues in cabinet, to discuss any further action necessary on the government's part. We will also work with our fellow provinces and the federal government to ensure that all necessary and possible steps are taken to restore open trade as quickly as possible. My government will press the USDA to appeal this injunction and quickly, and my government will meet with whomever necessary wherever necessary to discuss the harm to both countries caused by the decision.

1:50

Mr. Speaker, I would ask that no member of this Assembly believe that yesterday's injunction has anything to do whatsoever with food safety or disease prevention as it relates to humans. Canadian beef has met or exceeded every international safety standard known to man and woman. Canadian testing systems have been reviewed repeatedly by national and international bodies and have been deemed to be more than adequate. It is clear that what has happened is the result of politics and protectionism not safety. It is not science. Therefore, I do not expect yesterday's decision to withstand the clear-eyed scrutiny of science or a rational approach to trade policy.

Mr. Speaker, as rightfully angry as Albertans are about the decision, I urge everyone to keep in mind who's at fault here. Our disagreement is with a small group – and I emphasize a small group – of protectionist cattle producers in the U.S. It is not with the U.S. administration nor the American President. The U.S. Secretary of Agriculture is on record that he supports an immediate reopening of the border, and I believe that he, not R-CALF, speaks for the President and his administration.

Alberta, I would remind all members, has a good, positive relationship and friendship with the U.S., and while we expect the U.S. to be good neighbours just as they expect us to be good neighbours, we must not jeopardize that friendship by seeking revenge. We must work with the U.S. administration if we are to be successful in having this injunction overturned. Mr. Speaker, our work on this vital matter begins immediately. That work will not end until cattle are moving freely in both directions between our two countries. That is the goal of this government. It is the goal of every member of this caucus and, I'm sure, the opposition caucuses, and it is a goal that we will not be swayed from until we have succeeded.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Sure, like all the rest of us, I'm saddened that we have to rise again and face the need today to speak once more to the unnecessary suffering that is going on in rural Alberta as a result of the ongoing BSE crisis. Yesterday's Montana court decision to bring down a temporary injunction to prevent the reopening of the U.S. border to live Canadian cattle is just the latest blow to Alberta's farming communities. For almost two years this disease and the political reactions of governments at home and abroad have had a devastating impact on rural Alberta, not just farmers and ranchers and their families but implement dealers, truckers, and many of the other people whose livelihoods depend on the agricultural sector. Entire communities are struggling.

The decline of rural Alberta hit home once again for me while in Calgary last fall after I watched oil close at over \$50 a barrel and then visited Olds the next day and discovered that times were so tough in that area that a food bank has been set up. It's a shame to see that for all the prosperity Alberta people are still suffering.

The Alberta Liberal opposition has always supported farmers in rural communities. We want independently owned packing plants to be built in Alberta and slaughter capacities to be increased. The BSE crisis has proven that we cannot have all of our focus on the U.S. We need to seek out new markets for the high amount of product we have to export.

The Alberta Liberals believe that there's an alternative to the devastation of rural Alberta by supporting rural Alberta entrepreneurs. The Alberta government should provide infrastructure for water, roads, and land to help get small packing plants off the ground, set a 10 per cent cap on the monthly slaughter capacity of the big three packers coming from their self-owned herds, restrict market share and control of the market packers until healthy market conditions return. This may require capping process capacity of these companies and placing a moratorium on the purchase of Alberta-based processing companies.

The cattle industry was a vital part of Alberta well before this province came into existence. Beef producers and people working in related areas remain among Alberta's most important industries and serve as the backbone of rural Alberta. There are so many families relying on Alberta's cattle industry for their living that no Albertan can afford to ignore the BSE crisis and the devastation it has caused. We will do whatever we can and work with this government in any way possible to help bring this terrible situation to a positive conclusion.

I would urge the leaders of all parties of this Assembly to draft a resolution to be given unanimous consent by the Assembly urging the resumption of live cattle exports to the U.S.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would request unanimous consent of the House to allow the leader of the NDP to reply to the Premier's statement.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the ND opposition.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Premier has once again proclaimed his dedication to the farmers and family farms of Alberta. Unfortunately, farmers can't eat words. From the beginning the government has put all its eggs into the basket of getting the American border reopened. They have consistently told Alberta farmers to be patient, that relief was on the horizon.

However, certain political realities have been obvious. It was obvious to most observers that opening the border would be determined by politics rather than by science. As we pointed out over a year ago, the reopening of the border would be delayed until after last year's presidential election. It was also clear that R-CALF was not giving up its lobbying efforts.

Despite obvious obstacles to border reopening, the government continued to sell farmers a troughful of false optimism, and the results on farmers have been disastrous. This government's practice or failure to protect farmers from a distorted marketplace, a concern raised in this Assembly by the NDP opposition, has forced families from their farms and forced farmers to take work to replace the income they should have been getting from raising cattle.

We know that the packers have continued to make hundreds of millions of dollars of excess profits at the expense of Alberta producers. With the recent announcement that the border will remain closed, the packers are poised to once again make profits from a dysfunctional marketplace.

Statistics Canada reported last year that Alberta's farm incomes had plummeted by almost 70 per cent. Reports of farm bankruptcies and rural decline are the clearest evidence of this devastation.

It's time to stop waiting for the border to reopen. It's time to protect beef producers against a monopolistic packing industry. It is time to address issues around testing and time to develop real protection for family farms and rural communities. In this sitting of the Legislature the NDP opposition will be proposing real solutions to the real problems faced by real farmers. They deserve no less.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Hinman: Mr. Speaker, I would like to request unanimous consent of the House to respond to the minister's statement.

The Speaker: Hon. members, normally that matter would be dealt with according to the major caucuses in the House and the leaders of such caucuses. In the case of the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner he is one member of one caucus and not the leader of the caucus, as I recall. However, a request has been made by the member, and unanimous consent is required.

[Unanimous consent denied]

2:00

The Speaker: Hon. Solicitor General, did you give notice to me as well that you would like to make a ministerial statement?

Mr. Cenaike: I did.

The Speaker: Please proceed.

RCMP Drug Raid near Mayerthorpe

Mr. Cenaike: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a new minister I report to you and members of this Assembly a tragic situation. I understand that RCMP were conducting a raid near Mayerthorpe this morning, and they were met with gunfire. The latest information available to me indicates that this incident may be still ongoing as we speak, and details are still very unclear. My thoughts are with any officers or anyone else who may have been hurt during the raid this morning. In my previous experience as a police officer I know of the dangers involved in these kinds of incidents and the pressures and challenges faced by those who respond.

As Solicitor General I am gravely concerned with the level of illegal drug activities in Alberta. Albertans are thankful for the service provided by all officers in this province, and I along with my colleagues are praying for all individuals affected by this incident.

As well, together with the Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, we have been briefed and will monitor the events as they unfold.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora to participate.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have only the highest respect for members of the police forces of Alberta because they daily put their lives at great risk in order to protect Albertans and create communities in Alberta that are safe and secure. So we're

quite obviously shocked and worried about the events that are unfolding near Mayerthorpe, and our prayers are with them.

It's fitting, Mr. Speaker, that this Assembly begins each day with prayer, acknowledging our dependence on a power not our own, so we pray for the officers involved, that they would have courage and that they would have healing. Now is not the time to talk about issues that we must face in the future, like the underfunding of our police service in Alberta and dealing with gangs. Now is the time to pray for these officers and their families, and our thoughts are with them.

head: **Statement by the Speaker**
Rotation of Questions and Statements

The Speaker: Hon. members, before we begin Oral Question Period today, I would like to provide a statement to hon. members with respect to the conduct of question period today and Monday and Tuesday.

All hon. members should have on their desk a copy of a memo that I forwarded to the various House leaders yesterday, but I would like on the record to share these comments as we proceed to the first Oral Question Period of the 26th Legislature.

First, for the information of new members the chair wants to quote from page 415 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* by Marleau and Montpetit about the nature and importance of Oral Question Period, where it is stated:

The right to seek information from the Ministry of the day and the right to hold that Ministry accountable are recognized as two of the fundamental principles of parliamentary government. Members exercise these rights principally by asking questions in the House. The importance of questions within the parliamentary system cannot be overemphasized, and the search for or clarification of information through questioning is a vital aspect of the duties undertaken by individuals Member.

The chair notes that there is no House leaders' agreement about the conduct of Oral Question Period. Accordingly, it falls to the chair to determine the rotation of questions.

In the interest of certainty for today, for Monday, March 7, and for Tuesday, March 8, the chair will follow the practice in place for the 25th Legislature. At the end of the daily Routine on Monday next the chair will invite members, any member, to make submissions concerning the rotation of questions. These are oral submissions; they need not be in writing. After hearing these submissions, the chair will rule on the operation of question period for the Legislature by 5:15 on Tuesday, March 8, 2005.

That means that for today, for Monday next, and for Tuesday next the Leader of the Official Opposition or his designate will be entitled to the first three questions. The leader of the New Democratic opposition or his designate will be entitled to the fourth question. A member from the government caucus will be entitled to the fifth question. The Official Opposition will be recognized for the sixth, eighth, and 10th questions and members of the government caucus for the seventh and ninth questions. The New Democratic opposition will be entitled to the 11th question. A member of the government caucus may ask the 12th question, the Official Opposition the 13th question, and a government member the 14th question. Following the chair's ruling of April 11, 2001, which governed the operation of the last Legislature, government members would be entitled to ask subsequent questions should there be any.

In terms of proportion of seats the Alliance member would be entitled to the 58th question each week, although we will not hit that number by the end of question period on Tuesday. The practice that has developed in Alberta is for each member asking a question to be

entitled to a main question, which may include a preamble of a few comments, a couple of sentences maximum, and up to two supplementary questions with no preambles. The chair sees no reason to depart from this practice.

It has long been a concern of members that some questions and answers take up too much time. Members may be aware that the Canadian House of Commons has a 35-second time limit on questions and answers. The chair would like to see a similar system put in place in Alberta and would appreciate the contributions of members next Monday. For today, Monday, and Tuesday I will attempt to apply a 45-second rule. "Attempt to apply" are the operative words.

Another practice that will continue is that of caucuses submitting lists to the Speaker's office by 1 o'clock each day the Assembly sits of those members who wish to ask questions, and in accordance – always in accordance – with the practices and traditions of this Assembly the chair will retain discretion when it comes to recognizing members during question period.

The chair also understands that there may be some agreement amongst House leaders concerning members' statements and recognitions. While the chair recognizes the need to operate according to the will of the members, it must be done in accordance with the rules that govern the proceedings. In this case the chair is reluctant to depart from the requirements in Standing Orders until the appropriate amendments to those Standing Orders are passed or there is unanimous consent to waive those requirements.

Accordingly, unless the House decides to do otherwise, the chair will apply the rules from the last Legislature concerning members' statements. So as to provide for Standing Order 7(4), there'll be four members' statements today and next Tuesday, March 8. Today two will be by government members and two from the Official Opposition. Next Tuesday government members will be entitled to three members' statements and the Official Opposition to one.

On Monday, March 7, under Recognitions up to seven members other than members of Executive Council may make one-minute statements of congratulation or recognition. The chair will recognize five members of the government caucus and two members of the Official Opposition.

The chair will revisit the rotation of these items of business at the same time as the decision on the rotation of questions for Oral Question Period.

I hope that's as clear as it can possibly be. On Monday, before we call Orders of the Day, I am prepared to hear comments from any member in the House with respect to these three matters.

So we will now proceed.

head:

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: I'll recognize the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Ambulance Services

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Beginning with the provincial review in 2001, this government has been reviewing and studying ground ambulance services for almost four years, and now, just one month before they were to transfer responsibility, they cancelled the transfer, leaving municipalities scrambling and Albertans wondering whether they can rely on ambulance services. The government's mismanagement is not only irresponsible; it is quite possibly dangerous. My questions are to the Premier. Will the Premier guarantee here and now that this government will cover all municipal costs of delivering ambulance service in the next fiscal year so there is no interruption in the delivery of that service?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I will have the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness respond in further detail.

We won't be writing blank cheques, but we will treat each municipality fairly. Our priority is to ensure that Albertans have access to a solid and dependable ambulance system this year wherever they live.

With that, I'll have the hon. minister supplement.

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, the continuity of patient care and public safety is uppermost in the minds of both the government and the regional health authorities and the municipalities. I have spoken with the Urban Municipalities Association, with the mayors of the two larger cities, and with a number of other municipal leaders and have assured them that we will consider their costs, that we will look very carefully at how we reimburse them, and that we will give a very definitive answer on the manner in which that reimbursement will come by next Tuesday.

2:10

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. How can the Premier assure Albertans uninterrupted ambulance service when emergency workers in some areas of the province have already been given notice and are looking for other work?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I don't know that to be true. Perhaps the Minister of Health and Wellness can shed some more light on it.

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, in fact, anecdotally I have been told that there are a number of employees that are either contract or are employed by the municipality that have already faced other job opportunities or have been relieved of their duties, and we will be working with those municipalities. Again, uppermost in our minds is the best interest of the patient, a continuity of patient care. Where there have been people that have incurred expense or disruption as a result of this change, then I would assure this Assembly that we will be addressing those matters.

Number one, Mr. Speaker, the most . . .

The Speaker: I think we're going to move on to the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Ms Evans: All right. Thank you.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What a mess.

Again to the Premier: given that this government has been working on reviewing and studying this issue for almost four years, why were there suddenly one month before the transfer unexpected costs of such great magnitude?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, we're trying to get to the bottom of why those costs escalated from \$55 million to \$128 million. That answer will be provided as soon as we have it.

Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that I'm somewhat frustrated and a little bit perplexed as to why these costs have gone up because the ambulance review conducted by the hon. members for Calgary-Buffalo and Innisfail-Sylvan Lake took place I believe two and a half years ago. After a very careful and considered review of the multitude of ambulance services throughout the province they arrived at an average, as I understand it, that came out to \$55 million. Adjusted for inflation to 2005, it would be slightly more but certainly not \$128 million.

The reason I'm perplexed, Mr. Speaker, is that the intention was simply to leave ambulance service much the same way as it now is but have the regional health authorities co-ordinate the activities of ambulance services, recognizing – and I'm sure the hon. member agrees – that ambulance services are an integral part of the health system as opposed to fire departments and volunteer systems and so on.

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

Market Surveillance Administrator Review of Enron

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Electricity deregulation has cost Albertans \$8 billion – \$8 billion – and now there's growing evidence that deregulation opened the door for market manipulation, costing Alberta energy consumers who knows how much more. This morning the market surveillance administrator announced that they are asking the federal Competition Bureau to reopen its investigation into Enron's Project Stanley scheme. My questions are to the Premier. Given that the market surveillance administrator and the federal Competition Bureau see the need for an inquiry, will this government now follow suit and launch a full independent public inquiry of its own?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I'm not quite clear relative to the question. Is the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition asking us to launch an investigation into Enron or into the whole issue of electricity deregulation?

I'm not quite sure of the question, but maybe the hon. Minister of Energy is, and I'll have him respond.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would say that even in the deregulation this is also an example of how it worked in this sense. We have a market surveillance administrator, that monitors 24/7 all the irregularities. Through that period of time there were legislative hedges put in place while we were also giving experience so that the generators and everybody participating in deregulation could understand the new rules, new methodologies so that in case any odd variations happened in the marketplace, they would have a chance to legislatively by hedges protect the consumers. In this case Albertans have not been impacted in any significant financial way.

Dr. Taft: How do we know that?

Mr. Speaker, again to the Premier: given that a former Tory Premier launched a public inquiry into the Principal affair, when the investments of hundreds of Albertans were lost, will this Premier follow the example of his predecessor and call a public inquiry into Alberta's entire electricity deregulation experience when so much more is at stake?

Ms Blakeman: Exactly. Do the right thing.

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, we are doing the right thing, in response to a gratuitous comment from across the way. Electricity deregulation has worked. There have been some problems, admittedly, relative to billing by retail operators, but that has nothing to do with deregulation, which alludes only to the generation side of power. But I'll have the hon. minister respond.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: will the government make public the latest evidence that has sparked this new investigation?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I don't think that it's prudent to speculate or attempt to interpret the information contained in the documents relative to the 1999 Enron fiasco, which occurred – as a matter of fact, I was in Houston at the time that all of this broke.

I would remind the hon. member that there is an industry watchdog. He alluded to the . . .

An Hon. Member: Lapdog.

Mr. Klein: "Watchdog," I said. Watchdog. That is the market surveillance administrator. He has the expertise to review the materials, and he and members of his agency have been diligent in requesting all the relevant documents relating to this particular incident, Mr. Speaker. I would suggest that we let him get on with his work.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Government Aircraft

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At this same time last year the Liberal opposition exposed and questioned the government on their blatant misuse of government aircraft. It seems that the government hasn't changed their ways at all, and in fact the abuse of the government aircraft has indeed increased. My questions are to the Premier. Since the government was questioned last year, have they implemented any measures to ensure more efficient and accountable use of government planes so that taxpayers are not burdened with the costs of empty or single occupancy flights?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, the use of government aircraft is quite clearly to allow government members and members of the opposition who are on government committees to access all regions of the province in a timely manner.

Relative to the policy with respect to use of government aircraft I'll defer to the hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We certainly attempt to fill up the plane as many times as we can. This morning at 7 o'clock there were 24 people that were flown to Calgary on the Dash 8. There will be 37 returning on the Dash 8 this afternoon. These people are flying down for an incredibly important land sale, which actually brings money into this government and into this province. It is absolutely critical for those of us who live in rural Alberta to have access to rural Alberta. If I were the Liberal opposition, I wouldn't want us as the government in rural Alberta either because we help rural Alberta.

2:20

Mr. Chase: Again to the Premier: how can Albertans be assured that their tax dollars are not being wasted on flights for nongovernment reasons?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, the policy is quite clear that the planes are to be used for government business. But, again, if there is any doubt in the mind of the hon. member of the Official Opposition, the Member for Calgary-Varsity, I'll have the hon. minister respond.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Premier is absolutely right. The planes must be used for government business.

We do not delineate exactly what government business is. However, the ministers are held responsible for the booking of the airplanes to ensure that it is truly going for government business, and I trust the people on this side.

Mr. Chase: Again to the Premier: will this government commit to tabling the flight logs in this Legislature so that all Albertans can see for themselves what their tax dollars are being used for?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, the question is an interesting one. You know, I don't know if one wants to be subjected to boxes and boxes and boxes full of information. As the hon. minister alluded to today, there is – I don't know – a whole Dash 8 planeload of people heading down to Calgary, as they do every week, for land sales. Certainly, if members of the Official Opposition want to know about flights, they can access that information through the regular freedom of information program and access the manifests that way. If the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity has specific questions relative to the use of aircraft by myself or any other minister or member of government, I would invite him to direct those questions to me.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the ND opposition.

Ambulance Services (continued)

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Less than one month before ground ambulance services were supposed to be transferred to regional health authorities, this Conservative government has brought the process to a screeching halt, thereby creating a province-wide emergency. The complete lack of an action plan along with a lowballing of the costs involved has been obvious for months. In fact, I drew attention to this looming emergency in November, but the government kept claiming that the transfer was on track. My question is to the Premier. How can the Premier assure Albertans that their safety has not been jeopardized by this completely botched transfer of ground ambulance services?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, it has not been brought to a screeching halt. As a matter of fact, ambulances are running in Edmonton and Calgary and, indeed, throughout the province, and people are being transported to hospital. Just before coming in, I heard an ambulance siren, looked out the window, and there was an ambulance on the road, so obviously it hasn't come to a screeching halt.

Mr. Speaker, the review was done with all good intentions, and that was to find a way to bring ambulances into the health service, understanding that ambulances have evolved considerably over the last 20 or 25 or 30 years from being much more than a service to simply transport the sick and injured to being the first line of medical treatment, and we simply wanted to find a way to better co-ordinate under regional health authorities those services. It was determined that the cost initially would be \$55 million. Somehow that ballooned to \$128 million, and we need to examine why.

Mr. Speaker, I would remind the hon. member that two jurisdictions will go through a discovery relative to whether the system under the regional health authority works.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What action will the government take to make sure that the safety of citizens in communities like Wainwright is not put at risk since the paramedics and EMS personnel of the Wainwright ambulance society have

already received their layoff notices effective at the end of this month?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I don't know the situation specific to Wainwright, but I'll have the hon. minister respond.

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

Ms Evans: Yes. Mr. Speaker, I'm grateful to provide information to this Assembly. Our deputy is contacting the mayor in Wainwright to make sure that today we can make absolute arrangements, something that will ensure the continuity of service.

Mr. Speaker, the innovation and creativity of Albertans is never at question here. Although there has been, as the member described, a screeching halt of the transfer as it was originally intended, I can only anticipate what kind of criticism this government would have received had we proceeded where costs had apparently escalated three times the original estimates. We're trying to do the job properly, and our discovery over this next year will assure Albertans that it's not only a good service but that it's responsibly funded and provided for.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To the Premier: why is the Premier expressing surprise and frustration over the situation relative to ambulances when I raised this looming mess three and a half months ago, including specifically the woefully inadequate \$55 million allocation? At the time his government denied any problem whatsoever.

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, there were audited statements at the time that the survey was done, and I said that adjusted for inflation, \$55 million appeared to be reasonable, understanding the simplicity, in my mind, of what we wanted to achieve, and that is that ambulance services would ostensibly remain the same but would be governed and controlled by the regional health authorities. How it ballooned from \$55 million to \$128 million is what is perplexing to me.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Border Closure to Canadian Beef

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Montana court ruling that will leave the border closed to Canadian cattle dealt a devastating blow to our industry and our economy. My questions are to the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations, who is also responsible for trade policy. Can he update this House on the status of the proposed rule on live cattle trade given the current situation in Montana and the other actions taken today in the U.S. Senate?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

Mr. Stelmach: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the Premier said earlier today, all Albertans were obviously very disappointed with the ruling of the lone Montana judge. However, we firmly believe that the U.S. government will stand by their word, not only Secretary of Agriculture Johanns but also the President, to ensure that the border does open. These are court proceedings that'll take a bit of time, but we firmly believe that the American government is on our side.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My supplementary is again to the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations. What action is the Alberta government taking at this time to address this issue?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we do have legal counsel in Washington. We do have our envoy in Washington as well as our minister of agriculture working with the federal minister in Ottawa to ensure that we expedite the opening of the border. About February 2 and 3 the minister of agriculture, my colleague, and I personally met with a number of key officials from the American government. We talked about basing the decision on science and not emotion, and we were supported at every meeting, including the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

The Speaker: The hon. member?

The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Advanced Education Tuition Costs

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Speech from the Throne yesterday confirms the government's intention to overhaul its postsecondary tuition policy for the fourth time in 14 years, a clear and ongoing admission of failure to address the issue of affordable advanced education in the province of Alberta. My question is to the Minister of Advanced Education. How can the minister assure Albertans and their sons and daughters that this review will produce a policy that's any better than last year's new and improved policy?

2:30

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, access to postsecondary education is very important for all Albertans, particularly as we move to implement the strategic plan and make sure that opportunities that Albertans have can be achieved because they have access to the education they need. So we'd need to review the policy for both access and affordability.

It goes beyond tuition, Mr. Speaker, because in many circumstances the costs of going to school, whether you have to move from a rural area or whether you have to even move from one urban area to another, are perhaps even higher than the cost of tuition. So it's not just review of the tuition policy. It's review of affordability and review of how you finance that education. It's an understanding that there's a contribution made by society, an important benefit to society, Albertans being educated but also the need for students and their families to participate in the cost of education. So it's a review of the tuition policy, but it's broader than that. It's a review of affordability and how it's financed.

Mr. Taylor: To the same minister: what role, if any, will the proposed \$3 billion access to the future fund play in holding the line on tuitions beyond the academic year 2005-2006 freeze on tuitions?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, the access to the future fund is not designed to hold the line on tuition freeze or to be part of the ongoing operating budgets of the institutions. It's designed to ensure that there are better opportunities for access, better opportunities for affordability. That might be by way of, for example, people who want to contribute to setting up an endowment for scholarships or bursaries or rural access funds or those sorts of things. So it can play a role in financing, but it wouldn't play a role in holding the line on tuition fees or in the operating budgets of institutions.

Mr. Taylor: One final supplementary to the same minister, then, Mr. Speaker. Does this freeze mean that the minister thinks tuition fees in Alberta are too high?

The Speaker: Well, opinions are really not relevant in the question period, but if the minister wants to proceed, he can.

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, what's important is that many students across this province believe that tuition costs are getting out of hand. It's very clear that students and their families are concerned about the cost of education, and when students and their families are concerned about the cost of education, their government is concerned about the cost of education.

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

Softwood Lumber Trade Dispute

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My first question is to the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations. Can the minister provide the House with an update on the softwood lumber dispute between Canada and the United States?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, since the House last adjourned, there have been a number of court and trade challenges. The latest one is the extraordinary challenge under NAFTA, and we are awaiting the decision. In the meantime, remember that when the House adjourned, the tariff duties were about 28 per cent, and there was some hope that the Americans would reduce those tariffs substantially. Unfortunately, they reduced them to about 21 per cent. Presently they're sitting on more than \$3 billion of tariffs on the other side of the border.

We are awaiting the results of the first track, which is the litigation, and we will work on the second track, which is under the responsibility of the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development, in terms of looking at some policy renewal. But at the end of the day we want our money back.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental question is to the same minister. Can he tell the House when this softwood lumber dispute will be resolved?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we are now completing the fourth challenge. I suspect and it's the feeling of the industry and of governments on both sides that we may, as soon as this litigation is complete, enter into the fifth challenge. That is the reason why we're working with our federal counterpart and the industry and our minister responsible to try and find some sort of consultation process to maybe bring this to an end before another legal challenge.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My second supplementary question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. How is this ongoing dispute affecting our Alberta forest industry?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Coutts: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The softwood lumber trade dispute is challenging, certainly, to our province's

forestry industry but, more importantly, to the people that work in that industry and the close to 50 communities in this province that produce dimensional lumber. Fifty per cent of the dimensional lumber that is produced in this province goes into the international marketplace, the majority of that into the United States, and we're very concerned about how this trade dispute will have an effect on these communities as well as on our industry.

I can assure the Member for West Yellowhead that we will continue to work with the industry, particularly the Softwood Lumber Trade Council, and our colleagues at intergovernmental affairs as well as with the federal government to make sure that we can come up with some long-term solutions to this dispute for the betterment of all Albertans.

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

Grizzly Bear Hunt

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today marks the deadline for applications to be included in the random draw for the spring grizzly bear hunt to commence this April. This hunt is being continued despite the warnings of the government's own grizzly bear recovery team as well as the warnings of conservation groups which call for the spring bear hunt to be postponed due to the low numbers of grizzly bears in Alberta. To the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development: why is this government refusing to listen to the findings of their own experts and allowing the grizzly bear hunt to continue?

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

Mr. Coutts: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The endangered species committee that was set up by the former Minister of Sustainable Resource Development asked us to look into a number of things, and this was three years ago. They asked us to look at including designation of the species as it's threatened. They also indicated that there was no indication of declining numbers at this point in time and that the hunt really and truly has no significant factor in the population itself. As a result, we took a very cautious and a very conservative approach to the management of grizzly bears in this particular province. [interjection] Absolutely right. The job that we have in Sustainable Resource Development is to monitor and make sure that we put conservation methods in place for the future of the grizzly bear in this province.

Mr. Bonko: A supplemental question again to the same minister, Mr. Speaker: given that new evidence indicates that the death of one female grizzly bear can have serious repercussions, won't the minister suspend the hunt?

Mr. Coutts: Mr. Speaker, I believe that the hon. member is speaking about a study that came out of the University of Calgary for which members of Sustainable Resource Development provided information. The threat to grizzly bears in and around the park of Banff and south to Montana was based on the reproduction of the grizzly bears, and we have taken those kinds of studies into account when we took a look at the number of grizzly bears. Along with our DNA consensus, that is the best way of finding out how many grizzly bears there are in the province, we have made the proper decision that from highway 1 south to Montana and over to the British Columbia border as well as in the Willmore area there will be no

hunt. We will do hunting in areas where we know that the populations can sustain themselves.

Mr. Bonko: Third question, Mr. Speaker. When will this government take action to save an endangered species from extinction?

Mr. Coutts: Mr. Speaker, what we need to do is continue with bear management on the ground. We want to see bears remain on the landscape, and the best way for us to do that is to conserve and to monitor and make sure that grizzly bear species are here for many, many years to come. Some of the things we put in place as a result of the recovery team are appropriate, things like DNA consensus so that we know the actual numbers and we can actually tell what the numbers were, but more importantly poaching fines: \$100,000 if someone is caught poaching. That is a huge policy that was put in place to make sure that we have this resource for the future.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

2:40 Climate Change Technology

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are to the Minister of Environment. In his budget the federal government seemed to follow the lead of the Alberta government in emphasizing the role of technology in addressing climate change. What is Alberta doing to develop technology to contribute to the fight against climate change?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans, like all Canadians, want a healthy and sustainable environment, and technology is a key in terms of a solution in terms of helping the environment that we all live in. Investment in technology in Alberta universities, in research institutions is so critical in terms of today and into the future but at the same time maintaining a vibrant economy. I just want to say that the best way, I believe, to address climate change – and we've shown the Alberta leadership – is rather than buying a piece of paper and having money leave Canada, we believe it's best used in investing right here in Alberta at our own universities, that are true excellence across the province.

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

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A supplementary question to the Environment minister: is this technology in the future, or is it something which is happening right now?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, one thing about the Alberta attitude is that it's somewhat like one of the sporting associations' commercial that says: let's just do it. That's exactly what Alberta is doing. If I could use an example for you, in Joffre we are showcasing the technology to capture and store carbon dioxide. This is so important. We're investing in such areas as clean coal, the use of CO₂ for enhanced oil recovery, and hydrogen fuels in partnership with many stakeholders across this province and this country. From a pan-Canadian approach clearly Alberta is playing an important role in this technology initiative we're taking.

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

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the same minister. When will we see commitment and action on reducing greenhouse gasses?

Mr. Boutilier: Well, that's a very good question by the hon. member. Mr. Speaker, we are the first province in Canada to pass in this Legislative Assembly legislation called the Climate Change and Emissions Management Act. It was done right here, so I congratulate every member of this House who participated in that important law.

I also want to say that in terms of Alberta government buildings that are fuelled, are you aware that 90 per cent of the energy is through renewable energy sources. How much? Ninety per cent of the energy is through renewable energy sources, and that's because of technology, Mr. Speaker.

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

Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. About 31,500 Albertans with severe disabilities rely on the AISH program to survive. Right now that assistance includes a maximum cash benefit of \$850 a month. To the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports: when can AISH recipients expect that long-overdue increase in their monthly cheques?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite raises a very important issue. It is about the assured income program for the severely handicapped.

As you know, there was a review that commenced in September of 2004, and I'd like to begin, actually, by thanking the chair of the review committee, the hon. Member for Strathcona, as well as members that were on the committee from Calgary-Bow and from Calgary-Nose Hill. That report has been submitted to me, I can tell the Member for Lethbridge-East, just within the past two weeks. I am reviewing the recommendations of the report. They are important, and a part of that is the financial benefit that you have referred to in your question. I can tell you this: I will be getting back to the Assembly and releasing the report to the public in the near future.

Ms Pastoor: To the same minister, Mr. Speaker: will this government tie the AISH rate increase to the Alberta consumer index, the market-basket measure, or some other calculation of living costs?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know that the living allowance that the hon. member is referring to in the report is very important and on the minds of people who are currently receiving the AISH benefit, but I can tell you this: there were many suggestions from Albertans. There were over 18,000 submissions that the committee reviewed, and those suggestions were excellent in that they asked for a renewal of the AISH program. In that renewal package, which I'm currently reviewing, are a number of recommendations, and this very well could be one of those recommendations.

Thank you.

Ms Pastoor: Again to the same minister: when will the Renewing AISH report be actually made public?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I mentioned to the hon. member when we met – I think a couple of weeks ago we had the opportunity to meet – I am fast-tracking the report. As I indicated

to you, hon. member, I am currently reviewing the recommendations, and the report will be released to the public in the near future. It will be during this session. I am trying to tie it in with the budget and the fiscal year, so you will see it soon.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Beef Recovery Strategy

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's cruelly ironic that in the throne speech reference to renewed optimism in rural Alberta came the same day as the news that the U.S. border will remain closed to Alberta cattle. The Conservatives seem to have a one-point plan of action for dealing with the BSE crisis: hope and pray for a quick reopening of the U.S. border. Meanwhile, for two years nothing has been done to prevent the two big American-owned meat packers from profiting at the expense of cattle producers. My question is to whoever is second in command. Does the government have a plan B to deal with the continued closure of the U.S. border to Alberta cattle, and if so, what is it?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, I could certainly understand, as the member wasn't in the Assembly over the last period of years and is new to the Assembly, that he would not be as familiar with the six-point plan that in fact was introduced last fall, late summer. That six-point plan was built on the basis of the border not opening. It was not dependent on a border opening.

For the member's information, because I think he's truly interested in rural Alberta, I would reiterate very quickly some of the comments that the Premier made. We have increased our slaughter capacity in Canada over 20 per cent. In fact, last year were the highest slaughter numbers that we have had in the history of the industry. We have over a dozen – the last count I had was before Christmas – 16 new beef products on the shelf by Alberta companies and entrepreneurs, advanced work in marketing into new markets.

Mr. Speaker, cattle prices are as high or higher on the calf and yearling market than they've ever been. Fat prices are being held because of the program that was put in place in Alberta for feed and basis. If the hon. member would like to discuss that further, I'd be happy to talk to him about it.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, in view of the fact that we don't know when that border is going to open, the six-point plan doesn't mean anything right now. My question to the minister is simply this. What are the plans, other than the six-point plan, if this doesn't open and stays that way indefinitely?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, again the hon. member misses the point. The six-point plan does not hinge on the border opening. In fact, what it plans on by this fall is Canada being totally self-sufficient in slaughter and not dependent on the U.S. market. [some applause]

2:50

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, we can pound all we want, but the reality is – then if we're talking about slaughter capacity, my final question is: why has the Alberta government continued to block efforts by groups like the Peace Country Tender Beef Co-op to expand value-added meat packing in Alberta? They'll be setting up in Dawson Creek in B.C. How do they justify that?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to respond to that, and I in fact would be pleased to ask the hon. minister of agriculture to

table the work that was done with Peace Country because, in fact, we did work with them. Their decision to move was their decision, and I would remind him that Dawson Creek is not very far across the Alberta border. We're talking about Canadian slaughter capacity.

I would remind him that at Sunterra 800 head a day will be up and running this fall and of recent announcements about a cow plant in southern Alberta. We hope there'll be more in the north. I remind the hon. member again that our slaughter capacity has increased over 20 per cent, the highest it's ever been in this country in the history of the industry, in these recent months, and it's being done because of the initiatives that we put in place well over a year ago to ensure that slaughter capacity increased. He might want to write to another government in this country and ask why the delay in their portion of it.

Youth Residential Drug Treatment

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, there is a battle raging in our province and in our country for the hearts and minds of our children. Children addicted to drugs or alcohol are torn away from their families and all that is good into a life of crime, sickness, and death. The government of Alberta has received a growing number of requests to address the increasing demand for youth detoxification and residential treatment services. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Will the Ministry of Health and Wellness provide funding for youth residential treatment facilities?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I agree with the hon. Member for Red Deer-North about the scourge of drugs and increasing addictions that are facing our young people. The exact amounts for funding have not been determined yet for the 2005-06 year, but I've consulted with the chair of AADAC, the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed, about expanding addiction services. Currently there are several outpatient services.

I think what the hon. member is looking at are some more intensive, secure types of treatments. Mr. Speaker, with the professionals from AADAC and in conjunction with other ministries, we're looking at the opportunities we have to actually expand in communities in Alberta and take a giant step forward to healing young people.

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, to the Minister of Children's Services: since this is a cross-ministry concern, will Children's Services provide support for youth residential treatment facilities in Alberta?

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

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can tell the hon. member that if a child is in the care of Children's Services, we do provide alcohol treatment. For example, we are partnered with AADAC on the Chimo Healing Home, which provides addiction treatment. For example, if it's the protection of children involved in child prostitution and they enter one of our safe houses, we treat their addiction in that way.

The hon. member brings up some good points, and we'll continue to work with the partners that we need to on this very serious issue.

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, since this is a cross-ministry concern, my third question was to the Solicitor General to ask for support for our youth treatment centres. However, he has been called out of the Assembly to deal with a very serious situation related to drugs.

The Speaker: I take it there was no question there then.

Mrs. Jablonski: Yes, sir.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Market Surveillance Administrator Review of Enron

(continued)

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently revealed evidence from a court case in Washington state indicates that Enron may have conspired with other companies to manipulate electricity prices here in Alberta, a scheme Enron dubbed Project Stanley. My first question is to the Minister of Energy. How long has this government been aware of Project Stanley?

Mr. Melchin: Project Stanley was an acronym that came to light. There have been a number of acronyms used, I guess, but the latest information was just recently, back in February, when the market surveillance administrator talked about Project Stanley. We didn't know really what that meant per se. So it's new information.

On the latest, that came out today, I've got to congratulate the market surveillance administrator. They have been proactive in getting the information from this court case that's going on in Washington at the present stage and were asked if they would give complete disclosure as to any relevant information. Some of the facts that came out – I don't know if they're facts. It's just transcripts of phone conversations, so that doesn't necessarily mean what facts you have. You just have a discussion and a dialogue that's going on. Out of that, there was some thought that we ought to continue. We will be proactive. If there's any abuse in the system, the market surveillance system will act on behalf of Albertans to ensure that all Albertans are protected in electricity.

Thank you.

Mr. MacDonald: Again, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: is it the market surveillance administrator's role to manufacture confidence in electricity deregulation or protect electricity consumers from price gougers and market manipulators like Enron?

Mr. Melchin: The good news about the market surveillance administrator is that even as far back as when this story first hit, in 1999, they acted on it. Watching as the watchdog on behalf of Albertans, they actually did investigate this back in 1999. This is just old information that is coming to the forefront because of a court case in Washington today. They did act, but Albertans were always protected because of legislative hedges that were in place during that time such that no one would really benefit if in the design and transition to new rules Albertans would be impacted. They have acted appropriately.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: how can this government and this minister claim that the Enron investigation in 1999 by the market surveillance administrator is adequate, that it's enough, when new evidence has been uncovered and this new evidence is for the years 2000 and 2001 in regard to Project Stanley? How can you tell this Assembly that the market surveillance administrator and that system is working?

Mr. Melchin: It's important to note that Albertans have been protected back then, now, and in the future with respect to the role of the market surveillance administrator. They have acted very proactively in that regard. The information that's coming forward is in fact relating still to the 1999 issue. It does relate to that, and it is they themselves that have asked the Competition Bureau to further investigate. It is part of their role to ask for further investigation if there was an impropriety. But even with that new information, it's too soon to assess if there was any wrongdoing. It is only some information that's come forward. We do not yet, even at this stage, have all the facts.

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

Mount Royal College

Mr. Liepert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Advanced Education. Now that he has received the request from Mount Royal College to change its status to a university, I'd like to know what steps the minister will be taking to grant that request.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've had the opportunity to review a considerable amount of information with respect to the proposal by Mount Royal College to achieve university status. I must say that it's an interesting and unique proposal and has a lot of facets which are important to the whole postsecondary system in this province. I've met with the president of Mount Royal College and the chairman of its board as recently as yesterday. I've assured them that we will take a very thorough review of their proposal, and we will review that proposal in the context of the overall postsecondary system in the province. The college, of course, has to look out for its own strategic plan and its aspirations and goals. Our role is to make sure it fits into the continuum of education opportunities for students in southern Alberta and particularly in Calgary.

So we will be reviewing it in the context of the system. We'll be discussing the concerns of other members of the system, looking to see whether it's in the best interests of students in Calgary and southern Alberta, looking to see whether by making that change it creates any holes, creates any problems for students in other program opportunities, and whether it adds value.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, my supplementary question is to the minister. I'd ask him if it's his intention to hold public consultations in the city of Calgary with groups such as the students' union and the faculty before granting this request.

3:00

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, I've indicated to all players in the postsecondary system that I intend to work collaboratively with them, to have open, frank, and honest discussions with them about any changes, any moves that we make. We've started that process by virtue of a meeting that I held at Government House on January 19 with a broad cross-section of the system and followed it up with meetings with board chairs. I intend to continue that type of a collaborative process. At the January 19 meeting we had representatives of faculty associations and of student associations at the meeting, and we'll continue that process.

I wouldn't at this time intend to hold a public type of meeting but certainly intend to collaborate and discuss with each of the players in the postsecondary system in Calgary and, quite frankly, across the

province because the interest and questions come not just from the Calgary area but also from rural colleges, from other institutions across the province as to what impact, if any, the change in status might have on them.

Mr. Liepert: My final supplementary, Mr. Speaker, is to the minister. Since Calgary is the largest city in Canada represented by only one university, what is his timetable for granting this request?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's of course an important question to be determined and important to be determined on a timely basis. This discussion and the request have been in the works, I think, for a period of at least a year and a half, possibly two years, so it's important that they get a determination quickly. I have indicated to them that I will try and make sure that that happens as quickly as possible. We need to have the full and complete discussion. They need to have an answer by early May. We'll try and accomplish both the full and complete discussion and their timeline if at all possible.

The Speaker: That'll conclude the question period today.

I want to thank all hon. members for their co-operation. Today we had 14 hon. members who could participate, which is very good, very large. In essence, if you just took 14 members times three questions, that's 42, but two members only asked two, so in essence there were 40 exchanges. That's pretty good in a 50-minute question period. That would be really wonderful if we could continue this on a daily basis and all members would really be able to participate.

Hon. members, 30 seconds from now I'm going to call on four members to participate. I'll call first of all on the hon. Member for Strathcona.

Before calling on the hon. Member for Strathcona, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests** (reversion)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now that I've managed to collect my heart and put it back in my chest where it belongs, I'm grateful to have the opportunity to do this again. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House a longtime Liberal Party volunteer and most recently the chair of the very successful Edmonton leader's dinner, Mr. Keith Meagher, who is seated in the public gallery. I would ask that he receive the warm welcome of all members of the House.

head: **Members' Statements**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. Sorry. Strathcona, period. I've got to get used to that.

World's Longest Hockey Game

Mr. Lougheed: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. After 10 days, 4,457 goals, and one mangled finger, Dr. Brent Saik and his 39 fellow hockey players skated to a Guinness world record, completing the world's longest hockey game on February 21, 2005. Played in Strathcona county on an outdoor rink at Dr. Saik's acreage, known as Saiker's Acres, the players fought injury, exhaustion, and the

weather to battle it out for 240 straight hours of play, beating the old record of 203 hours. Referees ensured that the world's longest hockey game was played according to official NHL rules. Dr. Saik and his teammates tripled their own previous record of 80 hours set in 2003.

More impressive than their endurance was their dedication to raising funds for pediatric cancer research at the Cross cancer research centre. In 2003 Dr. Saik and his teammates raised \$140,000 and have already raised over \$100,000 this year, with donations still coming in.

Dr. Saik's hockey dream was almost finished before it started when he sliced off the tip of his middle finger while working on the Zamboni prior to the start of the game. Luckily, he was able to have it bandaged up just in time to make it back for the game-starting faceoff at 12:13 p.m. on February 11.

I and thousands of Albertans had the opportunity to go and watch parts of the game, which was open to the public all day every day. It was good to see the dedication and perseverance with which these players played the equivalent of an entire season. Without a doubt the funds raised for cancer research meant as much to the players as the record they helped to set. Pictures of family members who had battled with cancer were placed under the ice surface to help remind players of their commitment.

I'd like to thank Dr. Brent Saik and his teammates for their commitment to hockey but more so for their firm belief that we will one day, hopefully soon, find a cure for a disease that has prematurely taken so many loved ones from us.

Thank you.

The Speaker: My apologies. It is the Member for Strathcona.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Rotary International

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One week ago yesterday marked the 100th anniversary of the meeting of the very first service club. Rotary International was founded in Chicago on February 23, 1905, by Paul Harris and three business associates. In the 100 years that have followed, Rotary International has grown to include 1.2 million Rotarians world-wide belonging to 31,000 clubs in 166 countries.

From the very first project, which was a public comfort house in downtown Chicago, to the unprecedented response to the tsunami in southeast Asia last December the Rotary has truly been there when nature called. Whether responding to natural calamity, disease, famine, poverty, or local community needs, Rotarians have a 100-year history of putting service above self.

Over 200,000 young people have been the beneficiaries of the Rotary youth exchange program, while tens of thousands have participated in the ambassadorial scholarship program. Since 1985 when the PolioPlus program was initiated, more than \$500 million have been raised to immunize more than 2 billion children worldwide, resulting in the near eradication of this dreadful disease.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to acknowledge the generous gift of \$56,000 from this government and the people of Alberta, which will help to pay for the making of a compact disc which profiles last week's gala celebration held at the Winspear Centre. I know that all Rotarians and past Rotarians in the Assembly today would invite all Albertans to join us in congratulating the family of Rotary International for their wonderful achievements and in wishing them well as they begin their second century of service to humanity.

Mr. Speaker, if I may quote Sir Winston Churchill, a Rotarian from the Rotary Club of London, England, and if I might mention

that he was a parliamentarian of some note himself, he said: what is the use of living if it be not to make this world a better place for those who will live in it after we are gone?

Happy 100th birthday, Rotary.

The Speaker: Just out of interest, would the Rotarians in the Assembly kindly identify themselves? One, two, three, four, five. There are more than that. The Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, I believe, is one as well. Impressive.

The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Proliferation of Drug Abuse

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are facing a problem in this province that does not discriminate according to race, colour, religion, sex, or socioeconomic status. It is a problem that has existed in one form or another for a long time but has now grown to a size where more measures are needed to control it. This problem is the proliferation of dangerous drugs and the effects they are having on our children.

We see drug busts in the news, each one seemingly larger. Just today the Solicitor General gave a very grim report about a gunfight near Mayerthorpe, with a number of police officers no longer responding to their radios. We hear of grow operations worth millions of dollars and meth labs big enough to blow up entire city blocks if not handled carefully.

3:10

We need to take a tough stance against those responsible for these illegal enterprises. Criminals are taking bigger risks because of the bigger rewards. They do not fear our justice system. They rob us of our children and take away their innocence. We need to target organized crime since they are the fuel that is feeding our kids' addiction fires. We need to target the federal government and convince them that federal drug laws are weak and in desperate need of change. We need to come together as a community because it does take a whole community to raise a child.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta's parents deeply and unconditionally love their children, and it is hurting them intensely to watch them fall victim to addiction. These parents have the courage they need to help their children overcome their addictions. They have the will and determination to see the process through. What they lack are legal tools, and when Alberta's parents are given the legal tools to help their children, added to their courage and determination, we will all reap the benefits.

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

Freedom to Read Week

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to speak in recognition today of Freedom to Read Week, which is sponsored by the Freedom of Expression Committee in Canada and was celebrated the final week in February. Freedom to Read Week is primarily an educational opportunity to have people understand that even in Canada, even in Alberta we do not always enjoy intellectual freedom. The Freedom of Expression Committee organizes Freedom to Read Week and encourages Canadians to think about and reaffirm their commitment to intellectual freedom, which is guaranteed them under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

The Freedom of Expression Committee produces an information kit and website every year, and the Calgary Freedom of Expression Committee presents an annual award honouring freedom of expression. This year it was presented to my colleague the new MLA for

Calgary-Mountain View. The Member for Calgary-Mountain View was particularly honoured for his work with the antiwar protest movement, including his co-founding of the Canadian Network to End Sanctions in Iraq, now known as Canadian Democracy and International Law, and for his work in promoting the Kyoto protocol and linking it to health issues.

The Member for Calgary-Mountain View understands better than most that intellectual freedom can carry dire consequences. As medical officer for the Palliser health authority he was released from his job for speaking out in favour of the Kyoto protocol. His journey from that day two years ago to his taking his seat in this Legislature today on this first sitting day of the 26th Legislature is a story of personal integrity, hope, and advocacy.

We Members of the Legislative Assembly have a special privilege in this Assembly guaranteeing our freedom of speech. I ask all of you to help those outside this Assembly to achieve, enjoy, and protect that same right. And my personal thanks to the Freedom of Expression Committee in Alberta.

Thank you.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

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

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling a petition signed by 401 Albertans from Fox Creek, Grande Prairie, High Prairie, Red Deer, Valleyview, Vermilion, Stettler, Sunset House, and many other areas urging the government to

institute a fair and equitable minimum floor price for cattle that would be flexible to meet the changing needs of the cattle industry, including cow-calf producers, and curb the excessive profits of the major meat packers in the current dysfunctional market.

Thank you.

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

Ms Pastoor: I'm sorry; I'm new.

The Speaker: Please proceed.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Because the person that our leader had introduced earlier was actually not in the gallery, may I have your indulgence to introduce to you and through you Carol Weatherdon, the lady behind the petition I am about to present to you.

The Speaker: Do all hon. members agree that we can proceed to this introduction?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**
(reversion)

The Speaker: Proceed.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. I would like to introduce to you and through you Carol Weatherdon, who is in the gallery and is the lady behind this petition.

Thank you.

head: **Presenting Petitions**
(continued)

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present a petition signed by 4,175 Albertans petitioning the Legislative

Assembly to urge the government to

1. significantly increase the amount of the AISH monthly benefit; and
2. adjust AISH benefits on an annual basis to reflect changes in the rate of inflation.

Thank you.

head:

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre on a Standing Order 40 application.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to give notice that I plan to raise a matter of urgent and pressing necessity under Standing Order 40 at the appropriate time in the proceedings. I am sending the appropriate number of copies of the motion to the table for distribution.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give notice pursuant to Standing Order 34(2)(a) that on Monday I will move that written questions appearing on the Order Paper do stand and retain their places.

I'm also giving notice that on Monday I will move that motions for returns appearing on the Order Paper also do stand and retain their places.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure this afternoon to table the requisite copies of a review entitled Coverage of Members of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta from the Alberta Risk Management Fund. Also, members will see under Notices of Motions on Monday's Order Paper a motion for this report to be referred to the Members' Services Committee.

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

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand today to table three different documents. This first is in fact a letter addressed to you, written by me, and delivered earlier today seeking clarification on the authority of the Chief Justice in her role as Administrator of this Legislature as well as in respect to her participation in the legal decision which determined who would serve as MLA for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Speaker's Ruling

Tabling Correspondence to the Speaker

The Speaker: Hon. member, just a second. It's really, really strange. The chair will deal with hon. members in a very private and confidential manner, and members should be aware that if they convey anything to the chair, it will be dealt with that way. Never once would the chair ever consider making public correspondence or verbal statements made to the chair from any hon. member. If the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition wants to make public correspondence to the chair, he can do so. The chair will not deal with this matter outside of this Assembly. The member should know that. The chair also is in no position to provide legal opinions to anyone. That's clearly prohibited by all of the rules.

Proceed.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**
 head: *(continued)*

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second tabling is a letter to the Premier, delivered to him on February 28, urging him to review the Election Act of Alberta through an all-party committee.

My third tabling is documents from a constituent of mine operating a business called the Bon Ton Bakery outlining a new line of products he provides, encouraging healthy choices to address diabetes for all Albertans.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, did you want to come back?

Mr. Martin: Yes. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of an article printed in the *Calgary Sun* on March 2 of this year. The article quotes Calgary Mayor Dave Bronconnier objecting to accusations that municipalities were inflating the cost of ambulance services.

Mr. Backs: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table a document from Frontier Economics of Cambridge, Massachusetts, labelled Privileged and Confidential Communication with Counsel, regarding Project Stanley.

3:20

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

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table a letter to the Hon. Anne McLellan, Deputy Prime Minister of Canada, expressing my concerns about the closing of the RCMP forensics lab in Edmonton.

Also, I would like to table a letter from my colleague the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning expressing his objections and problems with the lack of wisdom in closing this very important RCMP forensics laboratory "as a cost-saving measure."

The Speaker: Hon. members, there is a series of tablings I have to make today. Pursuant to section 28(1) of the Ombudsman Act I'm pleased to table with the Assembly the 37th annual report of the office of the Ombudsman for the period April 1, 2003, to March 31, 2004.

Pursuant to section 46(1) of the Conflicts of Interest Act, chapter C-23 of the *2000 Revised Statutes of Alberta* I'm pleased to table with the Assembly the annual report of the Ethics Commissioner for the period April 1, 2003, to March 31, 2004.

Pursuant to the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act I'm pleased to table with the Assembly the annual report of the Chief Electoral Officer for the calendar year 2003.

I table with the Assembly the report by the Ethics Commissioner into allegations involving the hon. former Member for Edmonton-Norwood, Mr. Gary Masyk, dated July 20, 2004.

Pursuant to section 63(1) of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, *Revised Statutes of Alberta 2000*, chapter F-25 and section 95(1) of the Health Information Act and section 44(1) of the Personal Information Protection Act I'm pleased to table with the Assembly the annual report of the Information and Privacy Commissioner. The report covers the activities of the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner covering the period April 1, 2003, to March 31, 2004.

I'm pleased to table with the Assembly the 17th annual report of the Legislative Assembly Office of Alberta for the calendar year ended December 31, 2003, and financial statements for the fiscal

year ended March 31, 2003. This report represents the audited financial statements for the 2002-2003 fiscal year and the seventh annual report of the Alberta branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association.

head: **Projected Government Business**

The Speaker: The Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. Under Standing Order 7(5) I'd like to ask the Government House Leader if he would be so kind as to share the projected government business for the week beginning the 7th of March.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that there are no bills on the Order Paper at the moment, I will take some licence and indicate which bills might be introduced as well as the government business.

On Monday, March 7, in the afternoon under Introduction of Bills it would be our intention to introduce Bill 2, the Alberta Centennial Medal Act; Bill 3, the City of Lloydminster Act; Bill 4, the Alberta Science and Research Authority Amendment Act, 2005; Bill 5, the Family Law Amendment Act, 2005; Bill 6, the Fair Trading Amendment Act, 2005; and Bill 7, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2005. It's my understanding that Bill 201 and Bill 202 might well be introduced at that time as well. Because of the fact that those bills have not been introduced as yet, there may not be business available for the House under private members' business on Monday afternoon, and if that's the situation, then it would be our intention to ask for consent to use that time to speak to government business, being the reply to the Speech from the Throne.

Monday evening at 9 under Government Bills and Orders government motions that are on notice now with respect to supply, Committee of the Whole, adjournment, and spring recess might well be addressed, as well as address in reply to the Speech from the Throne.

On Tuesday afternoon under Government Bills and Orders it's anticipated that there may be messages delivered from His Honour the Lieutenant Governor with respect to supplementary supply. Also, under Government Motions, then, supplementary supply motions with respect to referral to Committee of Supply, and the number of days in Committee of Supply would be proposed. The remainder of the day would be spent in address in reply to the Speech from the Throne and possibly in the introduction for second reading of Bill 1 as introduced by the hon. the Premier yesterday. Tuesday evening at 8 under Government Bills and Orders address in reply to the Speech from the Throne and potentially second reading of Bill 1 and as per the Order Paper.

Wednesday, March 9, under Government Bills and Orders again address in reply to the Speech from the Throne. Wednesday, March 9, at 8 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders address in reply to the Speech from the Throne, potentially Committee of Supply, and potentially day 1 of two proposed days for supplementary supply.

Thursday, March 10, under Government Bills and Orders, Committee of Supply, supplementary supply, day 2 of two days.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'm going to soon recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre to proceed with a Standing Order 40 application. I would direct all hon. members to Standing Order 40 in your Standing Orders. Hon. members will be requested to vote.

head: Motions under Standing Order 40

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

Ambulance Services Funding

Ms Blakeman:

Be it resolved that this Assembly urge the government to provide all necessary funding to municipalities to cover the operation of ambulance services for the 2005-2006 fiscal year so as to maintain uninterrupted ambulance services and ensure that no municipality is put into a position of hardship as a result of this government's decision to cancel the transfer of ground ambulance services from municipalities to regional health authorities.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to present arguments under Standing Order 40. I believe we have the situation in place to address the urgency required by this motion. Standing Order 40 indicates that "in case of urgent and pressing necessity previously explained by the mover," the House will give unanimous consent without notice having been served under Standing Order 38, which would allow us to proceed with the motion. I have had the motion distributed to everyone, and I'm assuming that they all have it now.

I think there is no matter more pressing than addressing the services that Albertans rely on when they are sick and in desperate need of medical attention. The urgencies in this case, Mr. Speaker, are several, and I will proceed to outline them.

The new fiscal year and the original deadline of April 1 for the transfer of ambulance services is fast approaching. We are now less than one month away. This creates a fiscal urgency for those municipalities. The Legislature has not sat for over nine months. This is the first day, the first opportunity, we have had to raise the issue in the Assembly since the problems with the government's plan to transfer responsibility became apparent.

There are no government bills or motions on the Order Paper that deal specifically with this issue. There has been nothing raised through the projected government business that would lead us to believe that it might be addressed quickly. The provincial budget has yet to be given a date and at this point, I believe, is too far off to bring any certainty or financial relief to the municipalities in the short term or, indeed, before the April 1 deadline at all.

Some municipalities such as Edmonton have already budgeted on the direction from the provincial government that the government would be picking up the tab for the transfer and operation of ambulance services so that these municipalities should redeploy funding. They will be left in a fiscal hole, a fiscal deficit, if no solution is found in time.

We did ask questions in the number one position in question period today, but the question period format is not sufficient to explore this issue at length, and indeed that runs against the purpose of question period.

Mr. Speaker, the House does not sit tomorrow, and by the next sitting day, we would gather, four more days will have gone by without a resolution to this crisis. There is an urgency of public health and confidence in the public health system and delivery of ambulance services. Thousands of people rely on ambulance services each and every year in Alberta. There is a risk to the health and safety of these individuals if we cannot come to a successful consensus on the delivery of ambulance services.

3:30

The case for urgency couldn't be summed up any better than in the words of Garry Zinga, the administrator for the ambulance

society in Wainwright, who is quoted as saying: it's unconscionable to think that there wouldn't be an ambulance service in this region; I don't know what we're going to do and who's going to provide it.

I ask for the Assembly's agreement to this Standing Order 40 request to allow us to debate and accept the motion that I have proposed. Thank you for the opportunity.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

[Unanimous consent denied]

head: Orders of the Day

head: Consideration of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech

Mr. Lukaszuk moved that an humble address be presented to His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor as follows.

To His Honour the Honourable Norman L. Kwong, CM, AOE, Lieutenant Governor of the province of Alberta:

We, Her Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly, now assembled, beg leave to thank you, Your Honour, for the gracious speech Your Honour has been pleased to address to us at the opening of the present session.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At this time I move that this Assembly consider the debate on the speech of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor of the province of Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, colleagues, yesterday we heard the new Lieutenant Governor, His Honour Norman Kwong, deliver his first ever Speech from the Throne. Before replying to that speech, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to say how fortunate we are to have someone of Mr. Kwong's legendary character represent this Assembly and the people of Alberta. There is no forgetting the outpouring of sorrow and sympathy at the loss of Mr. Kwong's predecessor, the Hon. Lois Hole. Her good humour, easy grace, and undeniable compassion endeared her to all Albertans. Lois Hole set new standards for anyone elected or appointed to a public office. I think Dr. Hole would be pleased to know that the duty she has left behind, the people she had yet to meet, and the responsibility she worked so diligently to fulfill will be so ably and respectfully attended to by His Honour Normie Kwong.

I am extremely pleased to address this Assembly this afternoon. I say "extremely" because for a member of the Legislature there is no greater motivation nor realization of just how privileged we are and no acceptance of humility like that which accompanies the rather unique experience of losing and winning the same election. I am here today, Mr. Speaker, because of the wisdom of our institutions and the right of every Albertan to a fair and equal voice in a true democracy. If that's what it takes to validate a three-vote victory, then it's neat to be known far and wide as Landslide Lukaszuk.

Mr. Speaker, if nothing else, my recent experience has taught me that no matter who we are or where we come from, my colleagues and I serve at the pleasure and whim of two very important people. We know them as Martha and Henry, average everyday Albertans, Albertans who work hard to pay their taxes, to plan their futures, and to make a meaningful contribution to their communities.

My government colleagues and I pay close attention to the things that Martha and Henry have been telling us. We've discovered that average everyday Albertans are developing new ideas and progressive new outlooks on who they are and where they are going. I am

happy to report that Martha and Henry have been taking advantage of the Alberta advantage. They've become more cosmopolitan, better educated, better travelled, and more productive than ever before. Look around, Mr. Speaker. Martha and Henry have become leaders in business, made great discoveries in medicine, toured the world as talented performers, shared their knowledge as accomplished academics, tilled the soil as tireless providers, and helped shape the future generations of proud and prosperous Albertans.

In short, Mr. Speaker, Martha and Henry have grown up right along with the cities and towns and the economy of our great province. They value the prudent management of their finances, and they've earned the right to enjoy a high standard of living. They also believe that no government should attempt to micromanage their personal affairs or their morality. Martha and Henry are rational, intelligent citizens of a modern world, and they're quite capable of determining their own family values.

I believe it's incumbent upon this government and every member of this Assembly to ensure that we keep pace with the people who put us here. To provide the methods, means, and materials to sustain our momentum as we move into a new century of continued growth and prosperity, we must remain focused on the things that really matter, things like quality of health care, a good education, a clean environment, safe and secure communities, vibrant arts and culture, and a robust and competitive business environment.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta stands poised on the threshold of another 100 years of challenge and change. In 1905 our forefathers were busy building the foundation of what has now become the wealthiest, most productive province in the country. Today our job is to ensure that future generations are equipped to realize the same degree of success but in an even more competitive global market. There is no question that Albertans benefit greatly by virtue of our close association with our friends to the south. However, as markets evolve and new opportunities arise, we must actively pursue new commercial, cultural, and academic relationships with the world's most influential trading nations, especially those of the Pacific Rim and the European Union.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to acknowledge that according to the recent figures released by the hon. Minister of Economic Development, our province's total merchandise exports increased by over 16 per cent during the first nine months of the last year. That includes 88 per cent growth in manufactured goods exported to China and 28 per cent to Japan. Strong growth in the value-added exports means new jobs for Albertans and increased trade opportunities for Alberta-based business and industry. I encourage our government to build on these successes with a program to expand the number of foreign offices and our ability to liaise effectively with key decision-makers and trading partners throughout the world.

Mr. Speaker, with an estimated \$100 billion in new and proposed capital projects in the works our province boasts the most vigorous economy in the country, but that kind of success places great strains on our human resources and underlines the need for a skilled workforce. Our priorities must include facilities and programs to provide the vital educational and training opportunities Albertans need and deserve. In fact, it's difficult to overstate the benefits of a well-educated and highly skilled population. That's why the first piece of new legislation introduced this session is indeed cause for a celebration. Bill 1 will establish unprecedented new investment totalling \$4.5 billion in postsecondary education. Alberta's colleges and universities will see the creation of 15,000 additional student spaces as early as next year.

At the same time, Mr. Speaker, we'll see new initiatives to make postsecondary education more affordable for everyone. Bill 1 will also create a \$3 billion endowment fund supporting a variety of

innovative, new education-related projects, such things as a new centre for Chinese studies at the University of Alberta and the development of a province-wide digital library. It's apparent our government remains committed to any Albertan determined to achieve a quality education.

A few minutes ago, Mr. Speaker, I mentioned the caring, compassionate nature of Her Honour Lois Hole. I believe Martha and Henry share her belief that good government promotes personal independence but is also prepared to assist those in need. Even though some disabilities may not be apparent, AISH recipients are among those most deserving of our support. Government is to be commended for its promise to increase financial benefits for the severely handicapped but also for its commitment to programs such as Alberta Works, helping an estimated 20,000 unemployed workers find new jobs and new independence.

3:40

This year we can also look forward to new dental and optical assistance for seniors, improved accommodations for those in long-term care, a new initiative to prevent exploitation of young people, and an increase in Alberta's minimum wage. In addition, our government will soon become the first in Canada to introduce an official accreditation program for child care workers. Mr. Speaker, these kinds of supports for families, for workers, and for the disadvantaged clearly demonstrate that government has the willingness to assist those in need, the ability to encourage those who can help themselves, and the wisdom to know the difference.

In recent years, Mr. Speaker, no issue has received more attention or created greater debate than health care. Edmonton is extremely fortunate to realize the benefits of such world-class institutions as the Capital health authority or the Stollery children's hospital, for example, or even the newly constructed Alberta Heart Institute. We have become a centre of excellence in organ transplants, medical training, and research. Yet despite the fact that our health care system is the envy of jurisdictions across the continent, we continue to experience unacceptable delays and limited access to front-line acute care personnel. There is a shortage of qualified general practitioners and nursing staff. It is the responsibility of my colleagues and I to ensure that Martha and Henry have reasonable and convenient access to the front-line medical attention they deserve.

Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to see a range of new initiatives designed to make Albertans the healthiest people in the world, new systems to improve waiting list management, and electronic referrals between family physicians and specialists. This year we will also see a new focus on health and fitness, plans to reduce the high number of injuries and fatalities on our streets and highways, and new infrastructure to provide a safe, clean water supply. Albertans deserve no less than the best possible health care services and facilities in the world. This government is to be applauded for its determination to establish innovative, efficient, and affordable health and wellness solutions that are truly second to none.

Mr. Speaker, creative innovation and fresh new approaches to the problems of growing population are the hallmark of this government. Recently we've seen a truly innovative private/public partnership, or P3, in response to Edmonton's pressing need for a new ring road. I submit that our minister of infrastructure should be encouraged to employ similarly creative programs to bring vital new schools to Alberta's children facing urban sprawl and new neighbourhoods with no schools at all.

Last year our Premier announced an unprecedented \$3 billion fund to help build and repair much-needed new infrastructure across the province. This was truly a landmark decision, a decision that only

a province with robust financial resources would even consider. Even so, we must ensure that the funds are distributed in such a way as to recognize the diverse needs of nonamalgamated municipalities with their aging infrastructure and unique circumstances. Mr. Speaker, people who live in various municipalities surrounding the city of Edmonton make good use of our streets, roads, and recreational facilities every day, yet those who live in St. Albert, Spruce Grove, Sherwood Park, for example, pay virtually no property taxes to the city of Edmonton. In order to ensure the fair and equitable distribution of infrastructure funds, these kinds of issues must be taken into consideration.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta has established an enviable track record when it comes to economic development and attraction of new companies and businesses from all over the world. In a report released by TD Canada Trust two years ago the Edmonton-Calgary corridor was described as the only Canadian urban area to combine American-styled wealth with Canadian-styled quality of life. In fact, Alberta is renowned for its affordable tax structure, stable government, skilled workforce, and overall business-friendly environment.

But we're also famous for the amenities we enjoy as individuals, families, and communities. This year, in concert with our centennial, Albertans will celebrate the recent renovation of the Jubilee auditoria in Edmonton and Calgary. We have constructed new museums, recreation facilities, and entertainment complexes. We're proud of our low crime and low poverty rates, our high-quality education and health care system, and our clean environment. We enjoy short commutes, safe streets, a vibrant arts community, cultural diversity, and breathtaking Rocky Mountain resorts. There is little wonder why people from around the world can't wait to get here.

We have every right to take pride in the accomplishments of the past hundred years. But I think, Mr. Speaker, it's time to kick it up a notch, to use the fruits of our nonrenewable resources to move more aggressively beyond them. I see the character of my colleagues and the vision, energy, and depth to lead our province into a new century, a new century of connecting to the world, of developing new technologies and medical miracles, and of the never-ending pursuit of excellence. Call it the Alberta advantage or the next Alberta, it's all Alberta.

Thank you.

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

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour and a privilege to rise today to second the motion of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs and to see him in the House and to thank His Honour the Lieutenant Governor for the Speech from the Throne.

I'd like to begin by congratulating His Honour on his new role as Alberta's 16th Lieutenant Governor. I know that if the former Lieutenant Governor were looking down, she'd give him a big hug and say that she also approves of the new choice.

I'd also like to congratulate you, Mr. Speaker, for being re-elected as the Speaker of the 26th Legislature. If my experience in the House has taught me anything, it is that the Assembly is assured of another productive and disciplined session with you in chair.

There are a number of new faces in the seats that were occupied by past colleagues. Although this will take some getting used to, I am confident that these new faces will bring forth energized debate and that it will only further contribute to the success of the province and this government. Albertans have once again agreed in an overwhelming majority that the vision this government has for Alberta over the next 20 years is something that they want to be part of and contribute to.

I am as always humbled to have the opportunity to once again represent the extraordinary, wonderful constituency of Calgary-Shaw. It seems like yesterday, but only four years ago I addressed this Assembly for the first time. During my maiden speech I mentioned that the first member from Calgary-Shaw once described Calgary-Shaw as being three subdivisions in a series of cow pastures. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to pause for just a moment and remind the House once again that in the last sitting I represented the largest constituency in the history of the province of Alberta. At that time I had some 82,000 constituents. That constituency continued to increase to the number of 100,000 constituents until recent boundary changes when I was joined by the hon. members for Calgary-Hays and Calgary-Lougheed, and I'm thrilled to have them join me in the south. I'm confident that this number – I now have 36,000 constituents – will not remain for long as I have the privilege of representing one of the fastest growing constituencies in the province.

I believe that the message in this year's Speech from the Throne is extremely positive and one that the constituents of Calgary-Shaw and all Albertans can be proud of. There is much to celebrate during 2005, but at the same time there is work that needs to be done.

Mr. Speaker, I'd also like, though, to pause for just a moment and reflect. We're busy in this Legislature looking at new problems and issues, and we forget sometimes to look back at blessings. I feel very blessed to live in the province of Alberta. I heard recently in the news that being born in Alberta or living in Alberta is like winning the lottery. Truly, you don't have to go an inch out of this province to the right, left, north, or south to hear others say that they wish they had our problems and that we're so fortunate in this province.

Mr. Speaker, I look back to the tremendous growth issues that I had over the last four years. I saw this province step up and bring some 11 schools into Calgary-Shaw. We opened the south health centre so that constituents could go that didn't have family doctors. We also saw the Deerfoot Trail extension completed, and we broke ground on a new hospital in the south end of the city of Calgary. So we do have much to be thankful for.

It was almost 99 years ago, March 15, 1906, that the opening of the first Legislature and Alberta's inaugural Speech from the Throne took place at the Thistle rink before 5,000 Albertans. I can only imagine the excitement and the energy that was in the air that day: a province on the verge of charting its own destiny and a population waiting in anticipation to hear what the future had in store. And here we are a hundred years later with the luxury of hindsight to see where we strayed and how to take that lesson and use it to ensure that we stay the course over the next hundred years. There might not be 5,000 Albertans packed into the Legislature, but I can assure you that thanks to advances in technology there are millions of Albertans hearing our provincial centennial Speech from the Throne, and they too are waiting in anticipation to hear what the future has in store. The next hundred years are still ours to decide, and much of the population is counting on this government to make the right choices and the right decisions to ensure that Alberta's future is successful.

3:50

I'm happy to hear that the memory of Lois Hole will be honoured with the creation of a memorial garden. It's a fitting tribute to a fine lady. Through the positive effect she had on numerous Albertans, along with the Queen's graduate scholarship and fellowship program and the Lois Hole digital library, our beloved Lieutenant Governor will be in the hearts and minds of Albertans for generations to come.

Education has always been a top priority for me and my constituents. My constituency is full of young families with children in

elementary school, high school, and college/university. I'm happy to report that the government's class size initiative is working. I recently visited one of the elementary schools in my riding and saw first-hand that our schools have been able to lower class sizes to reflect the recommendations of the Alberta Commission on Learning. The government has injected some \$98 million into the system and provided 1,250 new teachers across this province to meet class size guidelines. School boards have chosen to direct these resources to early elementary grades.

I know it's working, Mr. Speaker. I recently received an e-mail from a constituent, a teacher who has called me many times over the last four years, and she writes: I'm having a much better year with only 21 in my grade 3 class; for the past 10 years I've had 30, and this year means a different style of teaching and much more individualized attention for my students; the class size initiative has been a real bonus for us; thank you. This is positive proof that the work we're doing is working and effecting positive change throughout the province. I know that this is an extremely important issue as it was the number one reason I was contacted over education in the last four years.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to bring attention to another accomplishment for my constituency. I was extremely proud, as all of us, I'm sure, as I watched the Premier's centennial address in February. You may have noticed that some of the segments were taped at the Centennial high school. I couldn't have picked a better location myself. It was fitting that the Premier chose that school as the setting to announce new investments in postsecondary education for Alberta. Once the school has a full student complement and all programs are up and running, Centennial high school will stand out as an example of the best that we can offer young people.

Centennial high school is the first high school to be built by the Calgary board of education in more than a decade, and it was built in Calgary-Shaw. The school opened to 550 grade 10 students and 34 staff for the year 2004-2005. The school is one of a kind, with many defining factors, including mentors to assist students in developing an individualized learning pathway and portfolio. The portfolio reflects student career pathways and high school learning experiences. This gives students the essential opportunity to explore career options and experience career pathways in health, human resources, arts and communications, science, technology, business information and management systems.

Mr. Speaker, this is another example of the commitment of Alberta to continually improve its education system and ensure that Alberta's youth have the skills and knowledge to carry on their successes. It's apparent through the commitment made in the Speech from the Throne that the actions taken in the past show that this government acknowledges and is committed to building the resources of our youth.

The work has begun to strengthen elementary and high school education, but I still have concerns regarding the future of postsecondary education in Alberta. We know that the bubble of kids moving through elementary and high school is now hitting our postsecondary system, and we don't want that bubble to burst as young people seek to further their education. I was so pleased to hear that over the next three years we'll be adding 15,000 spaces to the current 140,000 full time and 40,000 apprenticeship positions. I'm also pleased to hear that government has made long-term commitments to improve access by doubling additional spaces to 30,000 in six years and by 2020 increasing the number of new spaces for Alberta postsecondary students to 60,000. It's an important step in the right direction, and I've received many calls from constituents who are concerned about their kids being able to attend postsecondary. Increasing the number of available spaces is definitely a good place to start.

I'm also happy to hear that tuition fees will be frozen for the upcoming postsecondary year and that a new tuition policy is in the works. As I mentioned earlier, the future of this province is currently in Alberta's education system. It's up to us to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to play a role in the next hundred years of our province.

Mr. Speaker, it's more than evident that this government's focus for the 26th Legislature in Alberta's centennial year is on education and ensuring that Alberta's future is in good hands. I commend these commitments and look forward to the discussion and debates that will take place in the months to come on these topics.

There is, however, a topic on my mind that I would also like to bring forward, another major concern of my constituents, and that is the concern of health care and its costs. We must make certain that Alberta's health care system is sustainable and that we are doing our job to ensure that Albertans are the healthiest people in Canada. Alberta now spends more on health care each year than all the money we collect in personal income tax, federal transfers, and health care premiums combined. Health care spending could rise to almost a billion dollars in a single year. Health care and education are the biggest government expenditures, and they remain Albertans' highest priorities.

I am confident that very few individuals will disagree that making Albertans the healthiest people in Canada is one way to curb health care costs. I think that can be achieved by better tobacco reduction strategies and by reviewing other ideas that have been proven effective in other jurisdictions as well as many other innovative ideas that have been discussed in the past. I look forward again to the debate and discussion that will take place concerning Alberta's health care system, and I know that it's an important issue to my constituents.

Mr. Speaker, despite the work that needs to be done, Alberta continues to be the best place to live and work, and I am proud to call this province home. It is a privilege to stand here today amongst my colleagues, representing the constituents of Calgary-Shaw for a second term. The 26th Legislature will see the celebration of Alberta's centennial, a visit from the Queen, and the first full session of a debt-free Alberta. There is a lot to celebrate and a lot to be proud of.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, as we reflect on the past hundred years and celebrate Alberta's success and learn from its failures and mourn its losses, we can be certain that there are few other jurisdictions in North America or the world that have the ability and the resources to be a leader in innovation, a leader in health, a leader in education, and a leader for the next hundred years.

I'd like to close, Mr. Speaker, by referring to the Speech from the Throne, where it said that Alberta has

gone from being a long shot on the Canadian prairie to becoming a magnet for modern-day pioneers from all around the world . . . This centennial year people across Alberta will celebrate the amazing province we call home, and from this firm foundation we will look ahead to the prospect of building something even greater: the next Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker's Ruling Speaking Time

The Speaker: Hon. members, in your Standing Orders the standing order that applied to the participation here today by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs was Standing Order 29(1)(b), which provided up to 20 minutes to speak. For the hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw the standing order that applied was Standing Order 29(1)(c), which provided for up to 20 minutes to speak. Now I'm

going to recognize the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition, and the Leader of the Official Opposition can participate according to Standing Order 29(1)(a)(ii), which provides up to 90 minutes of participation. Following the participation Standing Order 29(2)(a) provides for a five-minute question and comment period.

The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour and my duty today on behalf of all Albertans as Leader of the Official Opposition to respond to the Speech from the Throne delivered in this Assembly yesterday.

First, Mr. Speaker, while we continue to mourn our truly beloved friend Her Honour the Honourable Lois Hole, we also celebrate our newly appointed Lieutenant Governor. The distinguished person who now holds this high constitutional office is one whose accomplishments stand as a model for our province's next 100 years. We welcome His Honour the Honourable Norman Kwong to public life in Alberta. We thank him for agreeing to give so much of himself in service to Alberta and Albertans, and I caution him now that I will be asking for his autograph when circumstances permit.

Mr. Speaker, we joined the Legislature to build. In responding today to the Speech from the Throne, I am conscious that my job, our job as Alberta Liberals, is to begin building a better future for Alberta. Every time we rise in this Assembly, our cause will be to better Alberta's future, and there is so much room to make Alberta's future better.

There is so much this Assembly can do to make it better. We can manage what we have so much better. We can reach so much higher. Alberta's future will be driven by the values of Albertans, by their energy, their thoughtfulness and imagination, their individualism, their grasp of opportunity, their respect for the land, their humanity, their commitment to community, their thrift, their sense of fairness, right, and wrong. The government of Alberta must serve those values to serve the future. Our government must serve our values.

4:00

Mr. Speaker, a hundred years ago the men and women of the North-West Territories worked with Canada's leaders to create the province they called Alberta. They breathed life into this Legislative Assembly. They built a working democracy, a system that could truly represent its citizens although the errors of those times excluded many: aboriginal peoples, many immigrants, and all women. But the system they built on values was and is strong and flexible enough to look at itself, to work towards correcting errors.

The people who laid Alberta's foundation are our ancestors in spirit if not in blood. They are the forebears of legislative democracy who planted their feet and spread their arms and stood tall to hold up a sheltering roof for democracy, and like the foundations and stone pillars and the great dome of this building they created a space for dreams and ideas, for possibilities and opportunities. Those builders of a new province understood they weren't just building roads and schools, towns and businesses, communities and a government; they were building a society.

The urgency, the creativity and energy of the first years of this Legislature were remarkable. The Liberal government of Alberta, the first government of this province, established the University of Alberta, the first step in creating Alberta's postsecondary education system. It empowered school districts and municipal governments, creating a comprehensive system of local government. It laid the foundations for telephone and electricity systems.

It led the way in recognizing the rights of women. In 1916 in response to the undeniable voices of Alberta women, this Legislature

recognized women's right to vote. This was an important start by a courageous government, but as I look around at the small number of women who are members of this Assembly today, I remind us all that a government guided by the values of Albertans will improve the representation of women in this Assembly. It will recover the creative spirit of democracy through democratic reform.

The Liberal government of this province placed the cornerstone of natural resource research and development in 1920 by forming the Scientific and Industrial Research Council of Alberta, which eventually became the Alberta Research Council. More than 80 years ago, an entire lifetime, that agency did the basic research on extracting oil from the oil sands that led to the industry that is driving Alberta's economy today. Far-sighted government.

As the decades passed, governments changed, but Albertans continued to bring their core values to the business of this Legislature. Mr. Speaker, the 1940 throne speech, delivered in this room on behalf of a Social Credit government, neither minced words nor counted pennies when it pledged social and economic justice for all Albertans. I quote from that throne speech.

We are determined to provide food, clothing and shelter for the people to the limit of our financial ability, and we will continue our unrelenting fight for monetary reform and social security with the determination to relieve unemployment and banish poverty from Alberta. No person should be allowed to lose his farm or home.

Those were the words from that throne speech.

In the 1970s the government changed again. Thirty-three years ago yesterday, in this very room, the Progressive Conservative government of Peter Lougheed delivered its first throne speech. The speech was sharply focused and specific, presenting a series of ideas aimed at improving government accountability and advancing Alberta society. Human rights led its five priority areas, followed by seniors' benefits, the family farm, handicapped children, and mental health, priorities that squared with the values of Albertans: values, passion, detail. The important throne speeches of Alberta's past respect Albertans' individualism, their thrift, but they set and reset our course with energy, thoughtfulness, imagination, humanity, commitment to community, respect and responsibility for the environment, a sense of right and wrong, and an understanding, a grasp of great opportunities.

Mr. Speaker, we can look back on Alberta's century with pride. We've built a remarkable society with elements of great success because we meant to, because we planned to, because we did our best to make the most of what we were given by good fortune or the grace of God. But in contrast to the passion and detail of great throne speeches, great plans for the future, we heard yesterday a laundry list, housekeeping, a disjointed, reactive response to the holes in this old government's moth-eaten program.

The Tory House leader gave us a sneak preview of this throne speech last week. The government's agenda is, he said, and I quote: mostly amendment acts improving, updating, and adding on to existing legislation. This Premier's often-repeated dream has come true. This really is a government on autopilot – or maybe four very expensive autopilots.

Mr. Speaker, let's look at recent history. The Tory governments of Alberta spent their first decade building toward a clear-eyed vision of an amazing future. They spent the next decade floundering, then the most recent decade reversing their course, cutting, hacking, slashing, following the motto sometimes attributed to a former Tory treasurer, "If it ain't broke, break it."

That brings us to now. No more of 1993's blind determination to pull the rug out from under education by chopping kindergarten. Instead, a present for every baby, a present for postsecondary education; an old government but not a wise government fumbling

for its second youth, marching ahead under a 12-year-old Alberta Liberal slogan but still without a plan.

The people of Alberta expect and deserve better from their government. The great governments of this province have known what they stood for and where they were going. They have known these things because they have known their values, and the values of the people of Alberta have been steady throughout the past century: individual rights, thrift, energy and initiative, imagination, humanity and generosity, respect and responsibility for the environment, commitment to community, a sense of fairness, right and wrong, common sense. Mr. Speaker, these values will guide Alberta's future. They will because they are resilient, enduring, and substantial in contrast to the insubstantial patchwork of a throne speech that parliamentary tradition invites me to pick over today.

We in the Alberta Liberals prefer to talk about tomorrow rather than yesterday. We have said it before. No place on Earth offers the wealth of opportunities we have here now in Alberta. Nowhere. We are unique. We are so, so fortunate. We are blessed. We have forests, agriculture, some of the world's most stunning natural landscapes. We live in peace and security. Albertans are energetic, hardworking, well educated. They bring talents, knowledge, and experience from all over the world. We live next to the richest market on the planet, on top of petroleum reserves that rival Saudi Arabia's. No place on Earth offers these opportunities except Alberta. What we make of these opportunities defines us.

What is it that we will make of these opportunities? That's what I want to hear in a throne speech. That's what Albertans' values demand. What will we make of our opportunities? What will we make of what is given to us, our luck, our blessings? That's what I want to hear in a throne speech.

4:10

Squandered opportunities offend our values, the very nature of Albertans: the flowering of individual talents and energies stymied, squashed; thrift discarded for unplanned spending and unaccountable excess; humanity and generosity sacrificed to arbitrary goals and then insulted by enormous surpluses sent straight to the banks. In the future Albertans will have a government that manages better and reaches higher. Our values demand it.

Mr. Speaker, there's an old joke that says that the best way to make a small fortune in the futures market is to start with a large fortune. As the Tory government congratulates itself and settles back for another spell on autopilot, that's the joke ringing in our ears in this Alberta Liberal caucus, and we're not laughing.

Since the Tories were first elected in 1971, they have had more than 135 billion windfall dollars to work with or to play with; \$135 billion in energy revenues have flowed through this government's fingers. No other jurisdiction on this continent comes close. And that's in addition to taxes, health care premiums, user fees, and everything else. That's a mix of 1971 dollars, 1981 dollars, 1991 dollars, and 2001 dollars. Adjusted for inflation today, that would be hundreds of billions, \$65 billion in this Premier's tenure alone. This government paid off a \$23 billion debt that it created with \$65 billion in revenues from nonrenewable resource revenues. That's bad management, bad government, the Tory-preached cutbacks cloaked as sustainability when they could've been building for an unparalleled future.

Mr. Speaker, that offends what Albertans believe in. It offends our thrift, our imagination, our grasp of opportunity. This is not the moment in our history for another patchwork plan. After all that cash we may not have dollar debt, but we still have social debt: two Albertas living side by side; unacceptable child poverty mocked by a one-time-only baby bonus; attention to the minimum wage and disability benefits, both arriving a day late and a dollar short.

We have infrastructure debts, a billion here and a billion there to make up for years of short-changing cities, hospitals, schools. Environmental debt: the fruits of an attitude towards fresh water, resource extraction, and climate change that too often says, "Use it like there's no tomorrow." Human debt: debt of the spirit, leaving some communities pitted against each other and arts and cultural expressions stuck way in the back seat while the engine of the economy roars ahead. Family debt: rural families stressed as never before, taxes masquerading as premiums and user fees, seniors served or abandoned on the whim of a moment despite the means to plan.

We don't owe a penny, but Edmonton and Calgary have the most overcrowded hospitals in Canada. We jerk our universities and colleges around like dogs on a leash. We have the highest high school dropout rate in Canada. We still have billions of dollars in unfunded pension liabilities, our liabilities. Farms and ranchers are facing foreclosure all over the province while the Tory government points fingers at Ottawa, Washington, and a court in Montana.

As Albertans what can we say about all this? That we'll wait for next year's Speech from the Throne? That we'll forgive and forget and hope that we all get a second chance? That the windfall will always be there? That our string of luck will never run out?

Don't our values demand that now is the time to make a plan? Even better, yesterday was the time to do it, yesterday when this government shredded a handful of Alberta Liberal policies and served the tatters up in a throne speech.

Mr. Speaker, let's look at this another way. Let's compare Alberta to other lucky energy producers. Norway since 1990 has built up a fund of about a hundred billion U.S. dollars. Alaska has an enormous permanent fund and sends money back to taxpayers. Kuwait earns more from its investments made with oil money than from its oil itself.

Meanwhile, Alberta's heritage fund is worth less in real terms than it was in the 1980s, and the best we can do is now to inflation-proof it. A hundred and thirty-five billion extra dollars in energy revenues since the Tories were elected, and it is virtually all gone.

What have we learned? That's what Albertans deserve to hear in a throne speech. What will we do if our luck continues? That's what Albertans deserve to hear.

Mr. Speaker, the praise this government gets for management is a triumph of image over substance. This throne speech should have told us that this Premier will no longer be the minister responsible for the Public Affairs Bureau, that he'll spend more time on substance than on spin.

Yesterday's throne speech watered down Liberal policies and called them Tory inspirations. The echoes begin with the evocative recurring phrase "the next Alberta." I quote from yesterday's throne speech. "The Next Alberta Will Be a Leader in Learning." "The Next Alberta Will Have a Diverse and Growing Economy." "The Next Alberta Will Be the Healthiest Province in Canada." "The Next Alberta Will Be a Leader in Canada and the World." Well, Mr. Speaker, The Next Alberta was the campaign slogan of the late Laurence Decore's Alberta Liberals in the 1993 election. Almost 12 years later the Tories' failure to remember that fact recalls their failure of imagination ever since that year.

Yesterday's throne speech went on to incorporate a damaged Tory version of the Alberta Liberals' plan for a postsecondary endowment fund, now through some epiphany the Tories' highest priority, and the sadly overdue increases in the minimum wage and assured income for the severely handicapped.

With all of those piecemeal borrowings we believe the throne speech missed the opportunity to borrow some other key planks in the Alberta Liberal platform, our plan for the future. Our surplus

policy, the Alberta legacy act, would create permanent wealth out of fleeting resource revenues by investing future surpluses in postsecondary education, in the heritage savings trust fund, in the restoration of our crumbling infrastructure, and in the arts, culture, and humanities.

Our bill would commit 35 per cent of future budget surpluses to an endowment fund for advanced education, uncapped and without strings attached. There is a plan to set innovation free as opposed to tying postsecondary education even more firmly to the apron strings of the government of the day. Thirty-five per cent of future surpluses would be streamed in the heritage savings trust fund, to grow it rather than be satisfied with simply preventing it from eroding away; 25 per cent would be put in a capital account to address the multibillion dollar backlog of infrastructure projects in this province; and the final 5 per cent would be invested in an endowment fund to support the contribution the arts and humanities make to Alberta society.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta Liberals have long stood for universal public health care, and we will continue to do so. We will continue to support the idea of a wellness fund created from tobacco taxes to support public health initiatives and research. We will continue to support health impact assessments for major policy decisions and a health auditor to ensure that Albertans are getting the best value for their health care dollars.

4:20

Alberta Liberals will also push to improve the democratic process for all Albertans. Yesterday's throne speech should have mentioned democratic renewal. Democratic renewal will come because Albertans' values demand it.

Alberta Liberals believe that open, accountable government follows naturally from a belief in fairness, that freedom of information should not be a euphemism for manipulating access to information when government has something to hide.

We believe we should call things by their right names. Wasted money is wasted money whether or not most of us feel prosperous for the moment. It's not good management. It should be fixed. The throne speech should promise to fix it. Call things by their right names. This government should not call its record in all areas of education, kindergarten to postsecondary, "previous efforts to strengthen the education system" in a throne speech. The throne speech shouldn't call privatizing health care a "third way." The Tories plan to violate the Canada Health Act, but they don't say it. They say that they will "make whatever legislative changes are needed to allow innovation to occur throughout the health system."

Open, accountable governments make plans, and then they review their performance against those plans. They budget, and then they review their performance against those budgets. They spend steadily less on special warrants, not steadily more. They listen to their Auditor General, and they commit to making necessary changes. I didn't see any of that in yesterday's throne speech. The Auditor General notes that in the area of health care, ostensibly a high priority throughout this government's tenure and again in this throne speech, there is no provincial health plan. Let me respond very directly to that section of the throne speech. It should be amended with 21 simple words: we will develop a provincial health plan, and we will disclose it to Albertans openly and accountably in their Legislative Assembly.

Let me also respond very directly to the section claiming that all Albertans will share in the Alberta advantage. The Auditor General examined the books of two agencies out of about 120 funded by the Department of Community Development to provide services for persons with developmental disabilities and found almost \$3.6

million improperly skimmed off by the operators in clear violation of their contracts instead of going to people with developmental disabilities. This section should say: we will plan and implement measures correcting all concerns raised by the Auditor General.

Tradition suggests that I should respond to what's in the throne speech, but I find myself responding to what is not in the throne speech. I quote: "The government will explore ways for the economy to be more knowledge based by adding value to primary resource industries and expanding manufacturing and business services." Or again: "Alberta's third way for health care is about making sure Albertans get the best health care services, what they need and when they need it, at a price taxpayers can afford." What's not there is content. The throne speech is missing information. The throne speech is missing information because of yet another deficit, a democratic deficit.

We in the Alberta Liberals believe we must rebuild democracy. When I listened to the throne speech, I heard the cynical manipulation of information by this government, the substitution of spin for substance, the contempt for this Legislature they have shown again and again while making billion-dollar decisions in backrooms. Add to that the sloppiness, incompetence, and corruption detailed in the Auditor General's report.

The Alberta Liberal vision for the future of Alberta is one of revitalizing our system and its institutions through democratic reform and renewal, ensuring that our government is responsible and accountable to the people of this province. In practical terms: fixed election dates every four years, a lobbyist registry, whistle-blower protection legislation, cooling-off periods for cabinet ministers and senior officials leaving government.

The first step should be to establish an independent citizens' assembly on electoral reform, with all recommendations put to a referendum. The citizens' assembly should have a mandate including reviewing the number of MLAs, reviewing electoral options such as proportional representation, considering preferential ballots, and examining term limits for Premiers.

Democratic reform should include a citizens' empowerment act to give Albertans the power to petition government either to introduce legislation they would like to see or to remove legislation. It should amend election financing laws to restrict individual, corporate, or union donations to a maximum of \$5,000 per political party per year.

Democratic renewal would include a Legislature that establishes an external, independent, nonpartisan committee to select the Auditor General and the Ethics Commissioner. It would strengthen the Public Accounts Committee so that even Premiers accept their accountability, supported by an open-book policy on government expenses including travel and credit card expense accounts. It would allow examination of the mandate, management, and operation of every government department every year.

Democratic renewal means amending the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. Albertans deserve prompt, affordable access to information even when it may embarrass the government. It means all parties with elected MLAs will be represented on legislative committees and that an independent external body will set MLA remuneration and benefits. Democratic renewal means replacing the current government-only accounting principles with generally accepted accounting principles.

That's what I wanted to see in this throne speech: some hint, some sign that we will not be subjected to government by unplanned, unprincipled, undisclosed whim and whimsy for another session.

First things first. Let's reinvigorate this institution, our government; let's use its capacity for self-correction to repair errors of the past; and then let's get down to the business of government with the

energy, attention, and capacity to tackle the spectacular opportunities that lie ahead.

Albertans demand a government that reflects their enduring values, one that joins them in putting their values into practice in building a better future for Alberta: individual rights, thrift, energy and initiative, imagination, humanity and generosity, respect and responsibility for the environment, commitment to community, a sense of fairness, right and wrong, discipline, common sense.

Albertans demand a government that has not exhausted its capacity to imagine that things might be done differently, that they might be done better, that they might be done according to a plan that informs and inspires where this throne speech does not. They deserve a government more focused on discharging its awesome and its historic responsibilities than on preserving its hold on power.

Albertans demand that we can and will again strive towards an Alberta that works for every Albertan, one that pays attention to equity as well as to debt, one that turns off the autopilot and seizes control of the future, building the best Alberta we can be.

Mr. Speaker, that's our response to this throne speech and our response to the opportunities ahead. That's the vision of the Alberta Liberals. Thank you very much.

4:30

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) now is available. Five minutes. The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I for one cannot sit quietly in this Assembly without challenging the drivel, the falsehoods, and the negativity that I have just heard from the Member for Edmonton-Riverview. He talks of building Alberta, but in his first speech in this Legislature he stoops to federal Liberal smear campaigns used by his corrupt Liberal cousins in Ottawa. My question to the hon. member: does he really think that he is building Alberta by delivering a message of despair and doom? Is that the kind of leadership we're going to see over the next four years from the opposition?

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

Dr. Taft: Yes. Thank you. The member reveals much about himself in that comment. I would say this. There is a huge lesson to be learned from the federal government in Ottawa about disclosing flight logs and flight manifests. When will this government live up to that responsibility to be open and accountable and honest to the people of this province?

Rev. Abbott: I'd like to know what part of the current hundred million dollar ad scam he sees as open and honest from his Liberal friends there in Ottawa.

Dr. Taft: It's irrelevant.

The Speaker: Others?

Then we will call on and recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, the leader of the ND opposition.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Let me begin in my remarks today by commending His Honour Lieutenant Governor Norman Kwong, who delivered yesterday's throne speech on behalf of the government. I wish to congratulate Mr. Kwong on his appointment as this province's Lieutenant Governor. Mr. Kwong is an Albertan who has accomplished much in the areas of sports, business, and multiculturalism, and I'm certain he will fulfill his

responsibilities as the province's Lieutenant Governor with honour and distinction.

Mr. Speaker, His Honour knows better than anyone else what huge shoes he has to fill in succeeding Mrs. Lois Hole, perhaps the most popular and most beloved Lieutenant Governor in the 100 years since Alberta became a province. For the past four years the former Lieutenant Governor fulfilled the duties of her office with grace, generosity, and with the hugs for which she was famous. I just want to say once more how much she will be missed by those of us with the NDP opposition and by everyone in this Assembly.

I would also like to take this occasion to thank the residents of Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood for the trust they placed in me last November 26 by electing me for a third time to represent them in this Legislature. It is indeed an honour to serve a provincial constituency as diverse and hard-working as Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, a constituency I am proud to call home.

Mr. Speaker, yesterday's throne speech was a disappointing document. Far from laying out an ambitious agenda for Alberta's next century, the government's commitments on the throne speech are a series of half measures designed more to put a happy face on the problems of the past than they are to chart a course for the province's future. The government seems so bereft of ideas that it's taken to stealing them from other jurisdictions and from other political parties, but if you're going to steal ideas, at least steal sensible ones. The Conservative government can't seem to do that.

For example, for its health care agenda the Conservative government has ripped off the slogan The Third Way from the United Kingdom in order to import a health care system from the United States. If you like the way the government is handling the ambulance transfer, you're going to love the way the government implements The Third Way in health care. Not much, Mr. Speaker.

For its grandiosely named access to the future fund the government is ripping off a flawed idea from the Alberta Liberals. I'm disappointed that the Conservatives had decided to use unplanned budget surpluses to set up the postsecondary endowment and to expand student scholarships. Relying on unplanned and unpredictable budget surpluses to fund endowments is bad budgeting and bad public policy. A March 2 government release that accompanied the throne speech says, "If there are any unbudgeted surpluses in future years, a portion of that surplus will go into this new endowment until it grows to a maximum of \$3 billion." Planned investments from future unbudgeted surpluses is in itself an oxymoron, Mr. Speaker. How can you have a planned investment from an unbudgeted surplus? Well, I'm sure that our former Provincial Treasurer could have told us that.

In other words, if there's a downturn in the price of oil and natural gas and future budget surpluses evaporate, Alberta's postsecondary students will either have no endowment at all or a significantly smaller endowment than first advertised. This is gambling with their future, Mr. Speaker. If endowments such as the one proposed for postsecondary education are set up, the cost of doing so should be built into the budgets up front and not depend on unbudgeted surpluses, as common as they are with this government.

The Conservative government has faced criticism, including from the province's own Auditor General, for systematically lowballing budgetary revenues, thereby leading to unbudgeted and unplanned spending partway through the fiscal year. Sometimes this unplanned spending starts before the ink on the provincial budget is dry. This government needs to be challenged to do accurate revenue forecasting for provincial budgets, not given the licence to dole out unbudgeted monies outside of the established budgetary process for its own ends. Banking on unplanned budget surpluses to fund endowments will make the government less accountable for the expenditure of public funds in the future.

My NDP colleagues and I are also concerned about the political motivations behind the postsecondary endowment fund. Yesterday's backgrounder that accompanied the throne speech certainly leads me to question that motivation. "The Minister of Advanced Education will then make decisions about how to allocate grants from the Access to the Future Fund." In other words, Mr. Speaker, instead of providing predictable, stable funding to our universities, public colleges, and technical institutes and letting them establish their own priorities, the Minister of Advanced Education gets to dole out the grants from the endowment fund at his whim. This leads me to question whether or not this is an endowment fund or just another political slush fund. In my view, this undermines the autonomy of postsecondary institutions and is not a step forward for advanced education in the province.

The tuition freeze in the throne speech is a bait-and-switch ploy, Mr. Speaker. It's only for one year. In fact, the government isn't even agreeing to freeze tuition at all, only to pay the costs of tuition increases for a single year, making it likely that students will be hit with a double tuition increase the following year.

The Alberta NDP caucus will continue to push for real solutions for Alberta's advanced education institutions, not band-aids. We will continue to push for an independent review of postsecondary education to fund long-term solutions to both affordability as well as to improving teaching and learning conditions at our universities, public colleges, and technical institutes.

I can move on to health care, Mr. Speaker. The throne speech says that "the days of endlessly studying and debating health care reform are over, and the time for action is now here." Yet, true to form, there is little or no detail about what those actions will be other than to study the problem some more by holding an international symposium of health care experts. To this day the Conservative government refuses to consult with Albertans about its so-called health care reforms, preferring instead to huddle with hand-picked experts. During the election the Premier repeatedly refused to discuss his health care plans with Albertans.

Unlike the Premier, my NDP colleagues and I have just returned from a province-wide tour where we asked Albertans, including seniors, patients, health professionals, disabled Albertans, and many others, to share their views with us on how to strengthen and sustain the health care system. From these Albertans we heard many excellent and exciting ideas which we are currently preparing in a report that we will table in this Assembly in the coming days. We heard about the need to expand public coverage of prescription medications while getting a better handle on the escalating costs of drugs. We heard about innovative suggestions about how to reduce wait times for specialists, diagnostic tests, and surgeries. We heard about the need to improve standards for long-term care of the frail elderly and the chronically ill, something that was also mentioned in yesterday's throne speech but on which very little action has yet been taken.

4:40

If there was a common theme to the presentations we heard from Albertans, Mr. Speaker, it is this: the best way to sustain health care is to strengthen public health care. We need to stop throwing money at more costly private approaches, yet I fear that this is exactly what this government has in mind with its so-called third way in health care.

The NDP invented public medicare, Mr. Speaker, and we can be counted on to defend it. Albertans can count on us to make the case for a strengthened and sustainable public health system, and the recently completed public hearings give us a good foundation for doing so.

Mr. Speaker, this is a government with an extremely poor track record when it comes to looking after lower income and working Albertans. After years of unapologetically having the lowest minimum wage of any Canadian province, an increase of that minimum wage sometime in the next year to \$7 will still only place us in the middle of the pack. While I welcome the review of employment standards announced in the throne speech, previous reviews have generally not yielded positive changes for working Albertans, and working Albertans and union members across this province are not looking forward to the potential that may arise from that.

The Conservative government has done several reviews of the assured income for the severely handicapped program. However, there's only been one single-digit increase in monthly benefit levels in the past 12 years despite the fact that our salaries as elected members are automatically adjusted every year. Disabled Albertans can only hope that the promised increase in financial benefits is a substantial one as there is a lot of catching up to do and that thereafter there is a mechanism put in place to link future adjustments to increases in living costs.

The throne speech says that Alberta agriculture producers are facing the future with renewed optimism. How ironic, Mr. Speaker, coming on the same day that a Montana judge threw a monkey wrench into the planned reopening of the American border for Alberta cattle exports. Not only that, but I have just learned that the United States Senate voted down the bill that would have opened the border to Canadian cattle by about 52 to 48. Again, the government's plans to deal with this crisis have been shown to be wanting.

Mr. Martin: Hope and pray.

Mr. Mason: Hope and pray is the answer that they keep coming back to.

It also exposes the government's continuing short-sightedness in placing all of its hopes in the reopening of the U.S. border instead of adopting an action plan to find long-term solutions for our farmers and ranchers. For over a year the government has rejected calls for a temporary floor price to curb excessive packer profits, to undertake universal testing of all cattle over 30 months, or to support increased packing capacity within the province to diversify export markets. They talk about it, Mr. Speaker, but we haven't seen any results yet.

Instead of adopting such positive solutions, the government instead continues to pursue its vendetta against the democratically elected Canadian Wheat Board. This attack continues despite the fact that Alberta grain farmers keep electing directors who want to maintain the Wheat Board's single desk marketing powers.

Mr. Speaker, environmental protection warrants only a single sentence in this throne speech. There's nothing said about addressing climate change or about the dangers posed by approving sour gas development near large urban centres. The water for life strategy is only mentioned in the vaguest of terms with no firm commitment to phasing out the use of fresh water by the oil and gas industry for well injection. These are important issues that my colleagues and I will be raising in this Assembly in coming days.

It is also disappointing that there is little in this year's throne speech about K to 12 education, this despite the fact that there is so much unfinished business in terms of implementing the recommendations of the Learning Commission. This unfinished business includes providing school boards with funding to implement kindergarten and junior kindergarten programs for disadvantaged children.

Mr. Speaker, yesterday's throne speech alternates between the rudderless drift of a government that has spent far too much time in

office and whose leader is packing his bags to depart and, on the other hand, doing damage control to try and fix past mistakes, mistakes that are very, very serious and very difficult to overcome.

It's certainly not a plan that Albertans can fly with, Mr. Speaker, and not one that the Alberta New Democrats are prepared to support. Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Red Deer-North, did you want to participate in Standing Order 29(2)(a)? We have five minutes.

The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and congratulations on your election to the chair. It's obvious that we will need your experience and your knowledge throughout the session.

I rise today to enjoy the privilege of being the third government member of this House to respond to the Speech from the Throne. Congratulations are in order to His Honour the Lieutenant Governor for his appointment to this very important position and for his most gracious presentation of the throne speech.

I'm honoured to have the opportunity and responsibility to once again represent the constituency of Red Deer-North, and I look forward to working diligently with all my colleagues in this Chamber to ensure that Albertans have the best economic health and physical environment in order to continue to be successful.

Mr. Speaker, this term is one of legacies: the legacy of Lois Hole, who has served Albertans with such dedication and integrity; the legacy of our hon. Premier, proclaimed nationally to be one of the best leaders that Canada has ever seen; and the legacy of Alberta's centennial, an event that will remain in the hearts and minds of Albertans for many years to come, especially the school-age children, who will always remember the very special day that they received their centennial medallion.

Mr. Speaker, at this point I'd like to acknowledge a great Albertan, the former Lieutenant Governor, Lois Hole, as my colleagues have done previously. She has left her hugs on thousands of people in this province, and her kind words and her legacy will continue to affect thousands more. Her list of accomplishments is impressive, and her commitment to honesty and goodwill is immeasurable. Lois Hole will remain in my memory as a true Alberta hero.

With the passing of Mrs. Hole comes the passing of the torch. I have no doubt that the new Lieutenant Governor will serve Albertans with the same passion and devotion as his predecessor. His Honour has demonstrated his love for all of Alberta by helping both the Edmonton Eskimos and the Calgary Stampeders to win that great Canadian Grey Cup. He is a football legend in the province, and with his new appointment as the Lieutenant Governor of Alberta a new legacy begins.

The next legacy, the one that will be left by the hon. Premier, is one of achievement, of sacrifice, and of commitment. What makes our Premier a great leader is his ability to sense the needs of Albertans and to turn their dreams into opportunity. Mr. Premier, we thank you for creating economic opportunities for Albertans to be able to realize their dreams.

Mr. Speaker, my young family moved to this great province 24 years ago from my hometown of St. Catharines, Ontario. My career choices in Ontario were limited to the usual and typical part-time jobs in banking and retail, and my husband's choices were limited to assembly line work for General Motors or the Ford Motor Company or as a communications technician for Marconi Canada or Bell Canada. Alberta opened up our suitcase of hopes and dreams and allowed us to fulfill our greatest potential.

Twenty-four years ago, when we drove our old car loaded down

with two children, one dog, one cargo trailer, one boat, and one very pregnant mama into the province of Alberta, we were welcomed by the great spirit of freedom, the great spirit of love for family, and the great spirit of entrepreneurship. The mountains confronted us with awesome wonder, the lakes greeted us with the colours of the wind, and the wheat fields waved to us as we passed by. We knew then that Alberta was a paradise where we could raise our family and have the opportunity to make our dreams come true, and more and more families keep coming every day because they know that this is the best place to live.

4:50

I thank our Premier and our government for not blinking in the face of adversity and criticism. I thank you for having the same courage and persistence as our pioneers, and I thank you for creating the economic environment that helped our family business to grow and to become very successful. Now that Alberta is the only debt-free province in Canada and our fiscal position is strong, we owe many thanks to you for leading us in this direction. I also thank you for introducing the Fiscal Responsibility Act as this legislation will remind future generations about the sacrifices made at the end of Alberta's first century by all Albertans to make life as an Albertan better in the second century. Your legacy will be timeless.

A very special legacy will remain from this term in Alberta's 2005 centennial celebration. This once in a hundred years event will allow us to look back and be proud of what Albertans have accomplished. We will unite in September and celebrate together the passing of this monumental time in our history, and we will leave legacies for future Albertans by way of centennial grants, the rebuilding of parks, historic buildings, and other important sites across the province.

Mr. Speaker, although it's a great time to be an Albertan, it's an exceptional time to be a member of this House. I'm very grateful for the opportunity to serve my province as the MLA for Red Deer-North and as the chair for the Standing Policy Committee on Justice and Government Services, and I thank the constituents of Red Deer-North for voting for me for the third time and for once again allowing me to represent them.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank all of the volunteers who helped me go door to door to listen to the concerns of constituents, who phoned people for hours on end, and who dedicated their time to ensure that I had the opportunity to stand here and represent them today.

I speak for all members in this House when I say that without volunteers Alberta would not be where it is today. The level of volunteerism in Red Deer and the rest of Alberta is very impressive. Alberta is recognized nationally and internationally as a leader in the voluntary sector. This is due to the strong values that make us Albertans. Among these values are three concepts – personal responsibility, caring about others, and family life – which are the ingredients for a healthy society. These concepts make up the values of the people of this province. Collectively there is no end to what we can accomplish.

I also thank Red Deer seniors who have worked with me and whose experience and wisdom have guided me through several decisions. Last session I submitted a motion to urge the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to review benefits for seniors and to raise the qualifying income levels for seniors' subsidies. The throne speech mentions that dental and optical benefits for seniors will begin on April 1, an announcement that makes me very happy. This session I have submitted a motion to urge the Legislative Assembly to review and implement regulations and standards for private, for-profit and private, not-for-profit long-term care facilities to ensure

that all seniors in any long-term care facility in Alberta are treated with the same respect and regulations everywhere.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta is strong because its base is the family. I would like to thank my family as their support and love is the wind beneath my wings. I would especially like to thank my loving husband, Bob, who continues to give me confidence and who inspires me to achieve everything that I thought possible.

Finally, my extended family, which consists of all the people of Red Deer-North. This constituency of about 32,000 people is a great source of pride, and I continue to cheer their every accomplishment. We have hundreds of small businesses that serve the oil field, construction companies, manufacturing companies, and farmers which are flourishing and growing. Red Deer is part of the economic corridor along highway 2 that drives our economic engine. Companies like Olymel, E-One emergency, Travelaire, Terroco, Halliburton, Safety Boss, and Nossack's are such important ingredients in the Red Deer-North recipe for a successful and diversified economy.

Infrastructure projects I have worked hard for in the Red Deer region, along with my hon. colleague from Red Deer-South, are the expansion of the Red Deer College library, the modernization and expansion of the Lindsay Thurber, Camille J. Larouge, and Notre Dame high schools, the hundred million dollar expansion of our Red Deer regional hospital, Red Deer's new \$7 million stand-alone cancer centre, expansion of the Red Deer health unit, and five affordable housing projects that will provide 244 homes in Red Deer to combat homelessness.

In addition to these infrastructure projects I've also worked and supported the hospital's Healing and Hope campaign, the St. John Ambulance Training Centre, the Children's Services Centre, the upgrading of Red Deer-North playgrounds for safety, increased funding for the Schizophrenia Society, funding for a detox centre in Red Deer, and a youth rehabilitation centre in central Alberta that I hope will be announced sometime in the future.

Finally, I presented Bill 202, the environmental cleanup act, that was unanimously supported in the Legislature, and I supported the north Red Deer water project. I presented Bill 23, Family Support for Children with Disabilities Act, which helps families by giving them two levels of service: family support services and child-focused services.

In this upcoming Legislature I will proudly push through legislation, Bill 202, to protect children abusing drugs, as a response to the growing drug addiction problem that is affecting so many families across this province. We need to keep the family strong as it is the core of a strong society, and with that core strong people are able to concentrate on living, working, and playing.

Mr. Speaker, we must remember that it is not governments that create wealth but people, provided that we have the policies which encourage them to do it. As a government we should not try to legislate everything as this will destroy the driving force of human nature, its inventiveness and ingenuity. We must leave the planning, the money making, and creativity up to the businesses that build up our economy.

We can, however, ensure that our children are healthy, educated, and productive members of society so that they can one day become

the brains and the sweat behind our economic engine. The fuel for this economic engine is a highly educated and productive labour force, and the education policies our government has introduced and will continue to introduce are the grease that the engine needs to work in the long run. I commend this government for recognizing the need for this grease, grease like the new postsecondary tuition policy that will make higher education more attainable for Albertans, the increased capacity for schools so that we have graduates to fill jobs, and our dedication to a knowledge-based economy. This is the wave of the future and another legacy that will be left by this government during this term.

This term will be one of legendary proportions. We will celebrate the life of the great Lois Hole. We will welcome His Honour the Lieutenant Governor. We will be led in this session for the last time by our hon. Premier, and we will celebrate Alberta's centennial. These people and all Alberta are associated with the pure pursuit of clear goals and desires of an honest and straight path to a great end. Mr. Speaker, I suggest that my colleagues remember why we are here and that we work together to keep the fires burning.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, would you like me to recognize you?

Ms Blakeman: No.

Prayer for Fallen RCMP Officers

The Speaker: Hon. members, I've been advised and it's confirmed that four RCMP officers were killed today and one was wounded. This will without any doubt go down, I am sure, as one of the darkest and blackest days in the history of Alberta.

I think we shouldn't be here. I have no right to say that, but I want you to join with me, please, in a moment of silent prayer. We extend to those four officers the hope that they will experience eternal peace, and to their loved ones, I would ask that all hon. members please provide them with all the strength that you have in your hearts so that it can be conveyed to them. This has to be one of our blackest days. Let's have that moment of silence and prayer.

Thank you. May they rest eternally in peace. Please be seated.

Hon. Deputy Government House Leader, I would ask you to move an adjournment motion, if you would.

5:00

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a sad and tragic day, and I commend you for the act that you've just taken to draw all members' attention to that. For the Deputy Premier and myself, who grew up in that area, it's doubly tragic to hear such sad news coming from there.

On that note, Mr. Speaker, I'm grateful to all the members for their understanding, and I would move that we call it 5:30 and adjourn until Monday at 1:30.

[Motion carried; at 5:01 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]