

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, March 7, 2005**

**1:30 p.m.**

Date: 05/03/07

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

### Prayers

**The Speaker:** Good afternoon and welcome.

Please join me in the prayer. We give thanks for the lives of Your faithful servants who defend the freedoms and values that are a true expression of Your divine intent. We humbly ask Your blessings and grace upon the members of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police who were killed in the service of our country and our communities: Constable Anthony Fitzgerald Orion Gordon, Constable Lionide Nicholas Johnston, Constable Peter Christopher Schiemann, Constable Brock Warren Myrol. We pray for the families, friends, and fellow officers of those who have died as they mourn their loss. On Thursday last we prayed in this Assembly. Let us do it again as we stop for a moment of silence in honour of the four RCMP officers. May God bless them all and extend eternal salvation in a heaven of peace. Amen.

Hon. members, on your desk is a blue and black ribbon with a pin. It was provided this morning by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and it may be worn in memory of the four members of K Division, Royal Canadian Mounted Police, killed on Thursday last while carrying out their duties in the service of others.

Those citizens of Alberta wishing to express their sympathies for the officers can visit the Legislature rotunda, where books of condolences will be available from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. today, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday of this week. These books of condolences were opened on Saturday last.

I would like to advise all as well that the Royal Canadian Mounted Police also have an online website, [www.rcmp.ca](http://www.rcmp.ca), that citizens can access and convey their messages of condolence.

We will now participate in the language of your choice in the singing of our national anthem, and we'll be led today by Mr. Paul Lorieau.

### Hon. Members:

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

**The Speaker:** Please be seated.

head:

### Introduction of Visitors

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Community Development.

**Mrs. Fritz:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today on behalf of my colleague the Hon. Gene Zwozdesky, the Minister of Education . . . Mr. Speaker, I apologize.

**The Speaker:** Proceed.

**Mrs. Fritz:** . . . to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Ms Barbara Pederson and Ms Mary Sertic, who I

understand are from the Department of Education's information and strategic services division. I would ask that both Barbara and Mary rise and receive the traditional warm applause of the Assembly.

**The Speaker:** Again we'll call on the Minister of Community Development.

**Mr. Mar:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Ambassador of France to Canada is in our province on his first official visit to the province of Alberta. It is my great privilege to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly His Excellency Daniel Jouanneau, ambassador of France. With His Excellency are Mme Jouanneau and Jean-Yves Defay, consul general of France for Alberta, and Mme Defay. The honorary consul to Edmonton, Dr. Jean-Michel Turc, and Mrs. Turc are also here.

This is His Excellency the ambassador's first official visit to Alberta. Alberta has always had a special and warm relationship with the people of French heritage be they francophone Albertans, the vibrant Québécois, or our trading partners, visitors from, or generous hosts in France itself. I ask His Excellency Jouanneau and his party to stand and receive the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly of Alberta.

head:

### Introduction of Guests

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

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly 30 grade 6 students and their teachers, Ms Natalie Gago-Esteves and Mr. Matt Thiessen, from the Brander Gardens elementary school in my constituency of Edmonton-Whitemud. They're here today to observe and learn with keen interest about our government. They're seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment.

**Mr. Cardinal:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly 19 department workers that are visiting the Legislature here today to see how we work first-hand. I'd like them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

**1:40**

**Mr. Stevens:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly this afternoon seven students from the Cedarbrae community school in Calgary-Glenmore together with teacher Ms Chari Smith and parents Mrs. Jan Coates and Mrs. Judy Arnall. In the three terms now that I have been in the Assembly, while I have had an opportunity to introduce people, I have never had an opportunity to introduce a school group. This is the first one in that time that has visited Edmonton while we've been in session. I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm response.

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

**Mr. Graydon:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure this afternoon to introduce to you and other members of the Assembly a fine young lady who provided valuable service to the constituents of

Grande Prairie-Wapiti last summer, worked in the office. Lots of very positive comments from constituents who called in with concerns that they wanted addressed to the government. I'd like all members to recognize Hannah Zacharias, who is with us this afternoon and is currently a student at the University of Alberta.

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

**Mr. Elsalhy:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you a school group from one of my favourite schools in McClung, called Callingwood school. The students, staff, and parents of this school are truly amazing, and I have a particularly soft spot for this school because that's where my five-and-a-half-year-old boy attended his two years of playschool. Today I welcome 17 students and their teacher, Mr. Lonnie Wilcox, and one of the parents, Mr. Peter Conrad. I ask permission to invite them to stand up and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

**Mr. R. Miller:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to have the opportunity to introduce to you and through you a group of 24 very energetic and enthusiastic seniors who reside in the Lifestyle complex in the fine constituency of Edmonton-Rutherford. They are joined today by group leaders Phyllis Lindsay and Mr. Bill Jones. I met with them a little bit earlier. They had lunch here, and they tell me that they've just had a wonderful day and were so pleased to have had the opportunity to meet His Honour Lieutenant Governor Norman Kwong. I'd ask your permission to have them stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

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

**Mr. Flaherty:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Mrs. Hubbard and her grade 6 class from Keenooshayo school from St. Albert and also Mr. Dennis Arnesan and Mrs. Sandi Mecir, who are volunteers. I believe they are in the public gallery. With your permission I will ask them to stand and receive the warm 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 through you to all members of the Assembly three international students who are currently pursuing their programs of study at the University of Alberta. Besides pursuing their graduate studies, these students are the founding members of the international student relief organization that raises funds not only for international students in need on campus but also for causes overseas. They and their organization have raised funds for the tsunami victims in Indonesia and Thailand. They are planning to hold an international cultural night on March 14, 2005, at 6:30 p.m. in Myer Horowitz Theatre on the U of A campus to raise funds, this time for tsunami victims in India.

These guests are Dr. Yokanath Sekar, Mr. Ouan Keosysano, and Sarabpreet Singh. They are already standing in the public gallery, so I would request all members of the House to give them a warm welcome.

**The Speaker:** Are there others? The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

**Mrs. Jablonski:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise in the House today to introduce to you and through

you to members of this Assembly two very important people from Red Deer, Darin Doel and Tracy Rosentreter. Darin is my constituency assistant, who does a tremendous job for me, and Tracy is a really good friend of mine. The two of them are here today in support of the introduction of Bill 202, the Protection of Children Abusing Drugs, as concerned parents. I would ask Tracy and Darin to rise in the members' gallery to receive the warm welcome from the House. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

head: **Ministerial Statements**

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

#### Deaths of RCMP Officers

**Mr. Cenaiko:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Much has been said about the RCMP shooting in Mayerthorpe. There has been much speculation about what happened and how it might have been prevented. It is natural for the public and the media to ask these questions and to look for answers, but I would encourage the members of this House to refrain from speculation.

In the coming days as funeral and memorial services are held, we need to stop and really think about the sacrifices these four men made for us. We need to honour their lives, we need to grieve for their families and their friends, and we need to pause for a moment and reflect on the remarkable service our police provide to us each and every day.

Later in today's session I will give notice of a motion. As you know, a national public memorial service will be held this Thursday afternoon at the University of Alberta. Because it will take place at the same time as our session, Mr. Speaker, my motion will seek to reschedule our session so that members can attend the memorial.

I would also like to report to this House, Mr. Speaker, that all members will be receiving a blue ribbon that honours these four RCMP members and all those who died in the line of duty before them.

Thank you.

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

**Dr. B. Miller:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I sent a note to the Solicitor General expressing my feelings that he has been under a great deal of pressure and he has spoken so well to the media to encourage all Albertans to enter into a period of grieving. It's just a terrible tragedy that has taken place. We talked this morning about the national public memorial service, and our caucus is in favour of suspending the usual business. It seems inappropriate to continue business as usual considering these tragic events.

This week as we continue to grieve the tragic loss of the four young men, we must deal with a variety of emotions: deep sorrow for the families of these men – nothing can diminish the pain which the families feel – and also anger, anger towards such an incredible, evil deed that in an instant took away their precious lives. At a time like this we realize how vulnerable our lives are and that life is such a precious gift, and we reel back from the horror of such violence which destroys life. May God give us courage, strength, and hope.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Mr. Eggen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would request the unanimous consent of the House to allow my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona the opportunity to speak on the statement.

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

**Dr. Pannu:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I thank the House for this opportunity. It's with deep sadness and pain in my heart that I rise today on behalf of my caucus colleagues and the NDP opposition to express our deep sorrow and regret of the tragic events of last Thursday. In the few days since the deaths of the four valiant constables from the RCMP, we have slowly begun to get a clearer picture about the crime that led to this terrible tragedy. To date the only thing we know for sure is the devastating impact this loss has had on the families, friends, and fellow members of the RCMP.

On behalf of the New Democrats I rise today to extend our deepest condolences to all those who have been affected by this loss. Our hearts are especially with the families and friends of the fallen officers and with the residents of the Mayerthorpe and Whitecourt area, whose lives have been so rudely jolted by this devastating event.

Every day we ask police officers to uphold the laws of our society. We ask these officers to put their lives on the line to safeguard our lives and our communities. Thankfully events leading to deaths of police officers are not commonplace, and that is what makes last week's events such a profound tragedy. We must do everything we can to learn from this tragic event. There has already been a great deal of speculation surrounding these events. It's my hope that collectively we can wait until all the facts are known before coming to conclusions, and I'm certain that as the grieving process takes its course and the investigation into last week's tragedy continues, we will be able to focus our attention on ensuring that such a tragedy never happens again.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: 1:50 **Oral Question Period**

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

#### **Inquiry into Deaths of RCMP Officers**

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The tragic events of last week leading to the deaths of four dedicated young members of the RCMP have devastated all Albertans. In the aftermath of this tragedy our attention turns to what can be done in the future to prevent incidents like this from occurring again. Our men and women who wear a uniform every day and put their lives on the line for our safety deserve no less. My questions are to the Solicitor General. What role is the Solicitor General's office going to play in the investigation of the events last Thursday outside Mayerthorpe?

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

**Mr. Cernaiko:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Solicitor General's office won't play any role with regard to the investigation but that of the employer of the provincial police service. The RCMP's responsibility is to conduct the investigation, and if there is any assistance that the Solicitor General's office can provide, we'd be more than happy to assist them.

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

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Solicitor General: does he know if there will be any actions taken or recommendations put forth while this investigation is proceeding to protect our police officers from being exposed to similar dangerous conditions?

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

**Mr. Cernaiko:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week I spoke to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Anne McLellan. I conveyed to her the Alberta government's opposition to the decriminalization of marijuana, that in the wake of this tragedy now is not the time for the federal government to weaken illegal drug legislation.

As Alberta's Solicitor General I am more committed than ever toward the dismantling of organized crime in every region of this province. My department has been working on a strategy, and will continue to do so, to dismantle organized crime that I will present to my government colleagues in the immediate future.

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

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, to the same minister: is the government considering any sort of provincial inquiry, public or otherwise, into the tragic events that led to the deaths of these four young officers?

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

**Mr. Cernaiko:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd ask the Minister of Justice and Attorney General to supplement the answer on this, please.

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

**Mr. Stevens:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all I'd like to point out that the members of the Justice department work very, very closely with the police services of Alberta, and on their behalf I wish to pass on condolences to the family and friends. This is a most tragic event.

We will be having a fatality inquiry with respect to this matter. The RCMP are currently conducting their investigation, and it is necessary for that to conclude before a date with respect to the inquiry is set. It's important that all of the facts be available, and we believe that as a result of having a fatality inquiry, those facts will be made public and the best opportunity to determine what can be done to avoid a tragedy like this occurring again can be had.

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

#### **Government Aircraft**

**Dr. Taft:** Thanks, Mr. Speaker. The Liberal opposition expects this government to know the value of a dollar, but this government's use of its fleet of aircraft indicates that it does not. To the minister of infrastructure: will the minister do the right thing and recommend to cabinet that the government fleet immediately be cut in half? Thank you.

**Dr. Oberg:** No.

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

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the former Minister of Economic Development, a known leadership contender for the government party, took over 100 flights on government aircraft last year alone, how can the minister assure Albertans that the government planes are not being used for the Tory leadership campaign?

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

**Dr. Oberg:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Each time a government minister books a plane, they do have to put down a purpose. As I mentioned in the Legislature on Thursday, that purpose can be government business, or they can be more specific. The ministers on this side have to get out to rural Alberta. I fully understand why the Liberal opposition does not want us in rural Alberta, but the rural Albertans are Albertans too.

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

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that most of the flights are between Edmonton and Calgary, when will the minister of infrastructure table the government flight logs that have been so often promised and that are supposed to state the reasons for the use of the fleet of government aircraft?

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation.

**Dr. Oberg:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last week the Liberal opposition was allowed to see our flight logs.

**Ms Blakeman:** Point of order.

**Dr. Oberg:** They had asked that parts of these flight logs and the manifest be photocopied. We gave them full compliance on this.

Mr. Speaker, the other issue that's very important here is something that the Liberals have championed for a long time, certainly this side of the House has championed for a long time as well, and that's freedom of information and privacy. Anything that potentially could damage the privacy of individuals will be severed before it is given to anyone. That's part of the law of this land, and it's something that we will adhere to.

**An Hon. Member:** You're hiding.

**Dr. Oberg:** Mr. Speaker, we are hiding nothing. We want to get it out. We have nothing to hide on this side.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Official Opposition House Leader, there was a point of order?

**Ms Blakeman:** Yes, there was.

**The Speaker:** Okay.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora with the third question from the Official Opposition.

#### Market Surveillance Administration Review of Enron

**Dr. B. Miller:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government can no longer ignore the mounting evidence that Enron colluded with Powerex to drive up electricity prices in Alberta. To the Minister of Justice: what investigations has Alberta Justice made on electricity price manipulation in Alberta?

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

**Mr. Stevens:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. None.

**Dr. B. Miller:** Will Alberta Justice now investigate the allegations that Alberta's laws were broken by unscrupulous market traders?

**Mr. Stevens:** Mr. Speaker, this is a matter that my colleague the Minister of Energy is following, and last week he answered questions in this House with respect to it. I'm sure that if the minister wishes me and my department to get involved, he will contact me. At this point in time there is no intention to proceed with anything.

**Dr. B. Miller:** Well, given that new evidence has revealed that Enron officials want to destroy all electricity trading tapes regarding Project Stanley, what is the minister doing to ensure that all evidence on this scandal is gathered?

**Mrs. McClellan:** Mr. Speaker, the market surveillance administrator has received some new information about the case. I understand that he's reviewed the new information and has asked the federal Competition Bureau to reopen the investigation.

**The Speaker:** The hon. leader of the ND opposition, followed by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

#### Border Closure to Canadian Cattle

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In the past couple of months in anticipation of the American border opening to live cattle exports, Alberta cattle producers finally started making a bit of money after enduring almost two years of losses while meat packer margins soared. However, returns for farmers literally evaporated overnight due to last week's Montana court injunction that is keeping the border slammed shut, and cattle producers are once again back in the red. My question is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. Given the overnight collapse in prices since last week's Montana court injunction, will the government reconsider its stubborn opposition to a temporary floor price for cattle as a way to curb packer profiteering in a dysfunctional market?

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

**Mr. Horner:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week's announcement was indeed a very, very frustrating development in our long and bumpy road to normalized trade between our two countries. I think it's important to note that our argument today is not with the government of the United States. They are firmly onside with the rule that they've prepared. The President of the United States has publicly announced his intention to veto any opposition to that in both Houses. The Secretary of Agriculture, Secretary Johanns, has been very, very supportive in his comments to it.

As to the pricing mechanism that is in place in the province of Alberta, Mr. Speaker, we are extending the calf set-aside program that was in place up to this point. We're going to extend it out farther. We've made some adjustments to it to be more market reactive. The industry is telling us that that's the way to go, and that's the way we will go.

2:00

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

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Given that the U.S. Senate voted 52 to 48 against legislation that would have opened the border, can the minister tell us what our envoy to Washington, Mr. Smith, has been doing in terms of lobbying the Senate of the United States?

**Mr. Horner:** Well, Mr. Speaker, that's an excellent question. I

must say that my understanding of the American system would tell me that the Senate needs a two-thirds majority in order to override the presidential veto. The Senators knew that; they knew it when they voted. They also knew that the President had announced his intention to veto that vote prior to the vote taking place. So I view the vote as somewhat symbolic. All politics is local.

The office in Washington has been instrumental, Mr. Speaker, in creating the context for us to meet with those Senators and Congressmen as well as members of the USDA as well as members of the National Cattlemen's Beef Association. The Premier instructed the office in Washington to stay in very close touch with all of the key members and key decision-makers there so that we can act as a team and work with our partners across the border.

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

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. If the minister and the government are again wrong in their predictions about American political behaviour, what does the minister then have to say to Alberta farmers who are losing their farms?

**The Speaker:** Well, that's kind of a speculative question, but if the minister wants to briefly say something, go ahead.

**Mr. Horner:** Well, Mr. Speaker, our plan that was developed last year, the six-point restructuring plan, was based on the fact that the border would be a long time in reopening. In fact, these developments this past month are far ahead of the schedule that we had anticipated previously. The six-point recovery plan, that we are working on right now and working on through and with industry, is working. We have had an increase in slaughter capacity in our province over 20 per cent since the first case of mad cow was announced. The industry is solidly behind what we are doing. In fact, I met with them this morning in Calgary, and we are working with them to make sure that what we do doesn't hurt the industry and, in fact, makes it a stronger one when this crisis is over.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

#### **Inquiry into Deaths of RCMP Officers**

*(continued)*

**Mr. VanderBurg:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Most Albertans are still shocked by the tragic shooting of four RCMP officers on Thursday in my constituency of Whitecourt-St. Anne. The family members, the police force, and our communities are in deep mourning as we face a week of funerals and memorial services throughout the province. During this time we must respect the families involved and not politicize this horrific disaster. My first and only question is to the Minister of Justice. Given that the minister has ordered a fatality inquiry, what will the minister do to ensure that the families' wishes for a week of mourning are respected?

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

**Mr. Stevens:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I certainly agree with the hon. member that this particular week is a week of grieving, of mourning, and that that is what all Albertans should focus on. In an answer to a previous question this afternoon I indicated that a fatality inquiry has been ordered. However, there is no intention whatsoever to proceed in any meaningful way at this time because the RCMP

investigation is ongoing. It was important to tell Albertans who were asking questions about what happened that there in fact will be a process, the usual process, if you will, to answer those questions. In the fullness of time it will be held, but it certainly won't be proceeding in any fashion this week, hon. member.

**Mr. VanderBurg:** Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, followed by the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

#### **Métis Hunting Rights**

**Mr. Tougas:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. Did the minister consult with any groups, such as the 14,000-member-strong Alberta Fish and Game Association, before entering into the interim Métis hunting agreement signed in September of 2004?

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

**Ms Calahasen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. No, we did not do that. We went into negotiations with the Métis settlements as recognized by the Powley decision, where the Métis community is the group that we would recognize. So that's basically what we did.

**Mr. Tougas:** Again to the same minister: given that no other province has entered into such an agreement, why did the government hastily sign this document without consulting all concerned stakeholders?

**Ms Calahasen:** Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, we did not do this hastily. The Supreme Court of Canada made a decision on the Powley decision actually in September of 2003. It took us a year to go into negotiations, and those negotiations are what sent us to make sure that we address the very concerns.

The one thing that I would like to say about the decision is that the decision came out with some areas where we were not quite certain as to what needed to be done. What we wanted to do was ensure that we were dealing with the Métis community to address a number of issues, and of course those ones were the conservation issues for the benefit of all Albertans, and I think that's really important when we're looking at these issues, when we're dealing with the rights of aboriginal communities.

**Mr. Tougas:** To the same minister: given that the agreement was created out of session and with no opportunity for public debate, will the minister commit to consulting with concerned groups before signing the final document?

**Ms Calahasen:** Well, Mr. Speaker, when we're dealing with minority rights, it's a decision by the Supreme Court of Canada to be able to address the issues, and each province then has to be able to address the concerns, as has been decided. What we have done is we made sure that we addressed the concerns with the very community that has been impacted and the ones who have the rights, and that's what we've been doing. It was a negotiated position with those communities. The rights were recognized and affirmed by the Powley decision.

Basically, what we did then was we made sure that we would work with that community to be able to address the very issues that the decision left, where we wanted to ensure that we took care of the conservation issue. What we did then was we made sure that we

would work with those communities. There is an opportunity for any other group to be able to identify should the interim agreement not do what we had intended to do.

I'm sure the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development may want to address that very concern about the implementation of the agreement.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

### Highway Safety

**Mr. Knight:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Economic activity is at an all-time high in northern Alberta, and this puts tremendous pressure on our highway safety and has been especially noticed in northern corridors like highways 43 and 63. Again this winter we are experiencing a high number of serious and fatal accidents. To the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation: what are your department's near-term plans to continue the upgrading of highways 43 and 63?

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation.

**Dr. Oberg:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Highways 43 and 63 are incredibly important to Alberta, especially as the increased economic activity in these areas just continues to blossom. On highway 43 we have already twinned a little over 300 kilometres of that particular highway, and there are about another hundred to go. We have been held up to a small degree because of some land acquisition issues. We certainly hope and would foresee that those will be done very shortly, within the next couple of weeks. So we will be proceeding with the twinning of highway 43, and hopefully we'll get it done as quickly as we can.

Highways 63 and 881 – and I would add in highway 881 because I do believe that that does add some potential outages for us on this – will be looked at very, very quickly. We are looking at a concise and comprehensive plan for the whole corridor up to Fort McMurray. Again, when you take a look at the economic activity up there, the number of people that are going to be travelling on that road, it's absolutely imperative that we do this.

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

**Mr. Knight:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: what message is your department co-ordinating with the enforcement agencies on these routes?

**Dr. Oberg:** Mr. Speaker, over the past winter we've seen a lot of accidents occur right across the province of Alberta. Many of these have had to do with enforcement issues: driving too fast, making left turns when they shouldn't, all of the above. We are putting together a concerted effort to ensure that there is improved enforcement, that the enforcement is out there. We are co-ordinating it very closely to the McDermid report, which was a very comprehensive, good report on the safety of roads in Alberta, and we'll be doing that very shortly.

2:10

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

**Mr. Knight:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: has highway maintenance or lack thereof contributed to the high collision rates, again, on these routes?

**Dr. Oberg:** I would love to stand here and say no, but I have been in communication with a lot of the municipalities in northern Alberta, and there certainly have been a lot of maintenance issues that have been raised with me over the past couple of weeks. Mr. Speaker, through to the hon. member, we are looking very closely at our maintenance contracts and ensuring that that standard of our highways is maintained. Quite frankly, I've heard some rather nasty stories about our maintenance contracts, so we will be taking a look at these, especially in northern Alberta, to ensure that they are to a high standard. Again, the transportation routes in northern Alberta are absolutely critical.

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

### Climate Change

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For several years the government of Alberta has committed itself to face the stark reality of climate change and to greenhouse gas reductions. However, the Alberta government has not created any absolute targets and only voluntary compliance. Alberta's greenhouse gases continue to increase in spite of this commitment. To the Minister of Environment: how can the minister tell Albertans that we are leaders in reducing greenhouse gases in Alberta?

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

**Mr. Boutilier:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very proud to say that the province of Alberta is the only government in Canada that has legislation dealing with true action on the issue of climate change. That speaks for itself in terms of why Albertans have been leaders in the past, will be leaders today and certainly into the future on this important issue in protecting our environment.

**Dr. Swann:** A second question, Mr. Speaker: given that some municipalities and companies in Alberta are already on track to achieve Kyoto targets in 2012, when will this government require all industry to meet their commitment?

**Mr. Boutilier:** This is so important, Mr. Speaker, the issue of a carrot or a stick. In changing behaviour, I think all of us as Albertans have a responsibility that we have our behaviour so that we do the right thing, rather than using a stick. In my meeting with the federal minister, Dion, when he visited on my invitation the province of Alberta just two weeks ago – I might also say that the province of Alberta is the only government in Canada that has Climate Change Central, an agency unmatched anywhere in the country because of the leadership we took seven years ago. We are on the right track. We want to do the right thing, but we're going to be doing it because our behaviour says that it's the right thing to do in protecting our environment.

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

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When will the Alberta government help industry by showing real leadership and work with other jurisdictions to establish consistent regulations?

**Mr. Boutilier:** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member makes a very important point relative to working with our stakeholders. It's not only industry though; it's every single Albertan. As you know, we got in our cars today to come to work, or we took public transit. If

I were to ask everyone in here, “Who took public transit? Who drove? Who walked? Who took a bicycle?” – the reality of it is that industry has a responsibility, and my comment to them has been this, that they can do better, just like all Albertans can do better, and that’s this government’s commitment.

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

### **Métis Hunting Rights** (continued)

**Rev. Abbott:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As was mentioned earlier, this government has entered into agreements with Alberta’s Métis people to permit hunting, fishing, and trapping year-round. Many of my constituents in Drayton Valley-Calmar are feeling that this is very unfair and that it will deplete the harvest for sport hunting and fishing. My questions today are for the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. Given that Alberta has resisted other Supreme Court decisions, with regard to same-sex marriage and the gun registry, why did we sign these agreements?

**Ms Calahasen:** Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, as I indicated earlier, the Supreme Court of Canada in the Powley case of 2003 recognized and affirmed that the Métis had an aboriginal right to hunt and fish as their ancestors had for generations. What it did was that it left some issues unresolved.

In terms of the question that was asked, under section 35 of the Constitution these are rights that cannot be questioned or in any way, shape, or form used with the notwithstanding clause. What they did, then, in the Powley case was they certainly affirmed those rights.

Basically, when we went into the negotiations, we wanted to make sure we did a number of things, Mr. Speaker. First of all, we wanted to have certainty . . .

**The Speaker:** Perhaps, hon. minister, we’ll get to that a little later. The hon. member.

**Rev. Abbott:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary question is for the same minister. Who, then, can claim these rights?

**Ms Calahasen:** Well, Mr. Speaker, the Métis of Alberta. As the Supreme Court of Canada indicated, there was a test for making sure that the Métis had a way to be able to identify themselves. One is self-identification, one is ancestry, and one is community acceptance. What we did was we decided that the Métis Nation of Alberta and the Métis Settlements General Council were the community that we use, so basically we had to ensure that that membership was going to be able to meet the test of what was happening under the Powley case.

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

**Rev. Abbott:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplementary question is for the same minister. Given that the original agreements were struck at a time when the common weapon was the willow bow and arrow, will we require the modern-day Métis to use such ancient weapons, or will we allow them to use the modern guns?

**Ms Calahasen:** Well, Mr. Speaker, nowadays it seems that those who have money can use the bow and arrow. Years ago we used to use the bow and arrow, it’s true, and we didn’t have the guns, but nowadays it’s those who have dollars that can use the bow and arrow, and we use the guns.

So I guess what we’re trying to make sure is that we have the

conservation issue in place. I’d like the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development to talk about the issue of conservation, which all Albertans are concerned about.

**The Speaker:** Perhaps another day, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

### **Workplace Drug Testing**

**Mr. Backs:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A recently leaked 2003 industry report to government said that Alberta should change its human rights law to allow random workplace drug testing. To the Minister of Human Resources and Employment: will the minister commit to tabling that report in the Assembly during this sitting?

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

**Mr. Cardinal:** Yes, Mr. Speaker. Once I do a thorough review of the report, no doubt it’ll be filed.

**Mr. Backs:** Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: is this government committed to bringing in mandatory random workplace drug testing to determine drug use risk rather than just impairment?

**Mr. Cardinal:** Mr. Speaker, I did have an opportunity to meet with a number of groups that are interested in that particular area. It is a very important area and challenging and not easy because you may introduce something that industry cannot afford or support. So we will be working very closely with industry, continue monitoring the situation, and make the necessary changes that are required.

**Mr. Backs:** Mr. Speaker, again to the same minister: as a show of good faith and in order to better be acquainted with this process, will the minister volunteer that Executive Council, cabinet ministers, submit to random drug tests to better understand this process?

**Mr. Cardinal:** Mr. Speaker, no, but the Liberals may want to do it.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

### **Government Air Travel**

**Mr. Eggen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The main purpose of the Alberta government’s aircraft fleet seems to be the operation of some sort of private limousine service for the Premier and the Tory caucus. Despite the fact that the government planes fly empty a good percentage of the time, the government has admitted that it also charters planes on occasion. My question is to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. How often does the government charter aircraft in addition to flying people around on the government-owned fleet?

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

**Dr. Oberg:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. There are occasions when we do charter planes. By far the most common occurrence of this is when one of the planes is out for maintenance. We’ve had several times when the Dash 8, some of the King Airliners have gone for routine maintenance, and therefore we have chartered them.

I think, Mr. Speaker, that we will be having some episodes where we will have to charter planes in the near future; for example, when

the Queen comes. All of these things are occurrences. We attempt not to do it unless there are outstanding circumstances.

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

2:20

**Mr. Eggen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Does the government, then, ever charter private jet planes, and if so, will the minister agree to make public information detailing the cost and the frequency of doing so?

**Dr. Oberg:** Mr. Speaker, I believe there have been four, five, or six different times when there has been a private jet chartered to go across Canada. Again, consistent with the freedom of information and privacy rules we would certainly make these public.

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

**Mr. Eggen:** Thank you. Finally, Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask: does the \$3.5 million cost to the Infrastructure and Transportation ministry of the government-owned fleet represent the entire cost to the government, or are there additional costs for the aircraft allocated to the budgets of other departments or even to the Premier's office?

**Dr. Oberg:** Mr. Speaker, each and every time the members of Executive Council utilize the government aircraft, it is billed to my department, which takes into account the \$3.5 million.

Mr. Speaker, one point I would really like to make and that I think deserves being said is that the province just to the left of us, British Columbia, recently went and sold their planes, and as of today my understanding is that their costs have been roughly triple what their costs were when they owned their fleet. So this fleet, although it's probably a break-even kind of point, does enable us – and I really have to say this again and again and again – to do our business in rural Alberta, which is critically important to the people on this side.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

### Beef Recovery Strategy

**Mr. Danyluk:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today was supposed to be an encouraging and progressive day for cattle producers. Instead, thanks to the actions of a group of protectionist ranchers in the United States our cattle industry faces uncertainty. Many ranchers and farmers who have had their livelihood and dreams again diminished are feeling the anguish of the challenge ahead. The Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development mentioned the progress on the set-aside program. My question is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. What else is the government doing to help our industry deal with the uncertainty they are currently facing?

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

**Mr. Horner:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a very good question. One of the things we are doing immediately with industry is going over our six-point plan as well as the set-aside program to ensure that we're on the right track. In addition to that, we all recognize that slaughter capacity is a key component of that, but slaughter capacity alone won't do it. We have to have international markets and marketplaces where we can diversify our markets. To that end, this morning I was with the Premier at an industry meeting

where the Premier announced a \$37 million new program for BSE initiatives, which is to increase our market access as well as deal with the question of SRM removal and to try to create more value on farm.

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

**Mr. Danyluk:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My last question is to the same minister. The Premier and the minister mentioned in their announcement about the progress tied to the six-point plan. Could the minister please enlighten us on the progress that's being made in other elements besides the plan?

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

**Mr. Horner:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, the six-point plan is what the whole industry is basing our recovery strategy on and a significantly increased slaughter capacity. I mentioned earlier in answer to another question that in Alberta our slaughter capacity since the first case of mad cow disease has gone up over 22 per cent. We are currently at a capacity that will increase to 67,500 head per week by the fall of this year. That's an increase of close to 800,000 head each year. In addition to that, current slaughter capacity for cattle older than 30 months, which is a real concern with our producers, sits at about 600,000 head per year. The proposed projects that we're aware of right now will increase that national slaughter capacity for older cattle to over 1.4 million head per year.

Our inventory management programs are coming along very well, Mr. Speaker. We are looking at other income support. We are reviewing the case program in conjunction with other provincial ministries in meetings we attended last week. In addition to that, the Premier invited me to sit in on a conference call where the Prime Minister and other provincial ministers spoke about the current situation and whether we needed to change plans or to re-evaluate our plans. The general consensus is we're on the right track. Industry is behind us, industry supports what we're doing, and they're very much involved in those plans.

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

### Trade Mission to Southeast Asia

**Mr. Agnihotri:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. From January 11 to the 21st of January 2004 the Premier led a delegation on a trade mission to India and Hong Kong. This trip cost Alberta taxpayers about \$64,500. My question is to the Minister of Community Development. What incentive has this government provided to the Indian film industry to encourage the production of movies in Alberta as a result of this trip?

**Mr. Mar:** None that I'm aware of, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Agnihotri:** Again, to the same minister: can this government prove that this trip provided a benefit to the Alberta film industry?

**Mr. Mar:** Mr. Speaker, I think this might be a question that may more properly be directed to the Minister of Economic Development.

**Mr. Agnihotri:** Another one to the same minister: can this government provide proof that all gifts over \$200 received by the government members on this trip were reported to the Ethics Commissioner?



**The Speaker:** Hold on. Hon. member, questions of that nature should be directed to the Ethics Commissioner.

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

### Prevention of Wildfires

**Mr. Strang:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Over the last five years we've seen wildfire devastation through several communities in western Canada and the United States. Following the Kelowna fires of 2003 the B.C. government released the Firestorm report, highlighting the urgent need for protective measures to be taken in and around forest communities to help protect them from wildfire. My questions today are to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. What is the provincial government doing to reduce the risk of wildfires around these forest communities?

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

**Mr. Coutts:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The province has started implementing FireSmart communities based on the principle of Alberta's at-risk communities that are in the forest. Certainly, you can see that it's no small task. Over the past five years we've come what I believe is a long way with the department and with the help of communities in assessing communities in the forest protection area, prioritizing them based on a degree of risk, and we're starting to develop an implementation plan for those who we deem to be a top priority. Right now the department is focusing on about 32 communities across the province, and every one of these communities is currently in the planning or the implementation stage of the FireSmart process.

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

**Mr. Strang:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary question is to the same minister. Why has it taken so long to see the results on the ground?

**Mr. Coutts:** The planning process, Mr. Speaker, is a very lengthy one. FireSmart is only a small part of a broader landscape picture. It's important to know that there are a number of other important priorities that have to be taken into account in making a FireSmart community, and those are fish and wildlife habitat, timber resources, public lands, and, of course, the all-important watershed. Work is proceeding in many of these communities. Particularly in West Yellowhead the town of Hinton is proceeding with their plans, and open houses will be held in Grande Cache and Robb in the coming weeks to gather public input on the FireSmart proposals that are before that community.

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

**Mr. Strang:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My second supplementary question is to the same minister. How long will Albertans who live in communities deemed as a lower priority have to wait to get this critical protection?

2:30

**Mr. Coutts:** Mr. Speaker, individuals can begin today, companies that are in the forest protection area can begin today, and communities can begin today. That is, we need the help of every resident, of every municipality, and of every stakeholder to make a FireSmart plan work in that community. Albertans can begin by fire smarting

their own particular properties, and municipalities can start by introducing FireSmart principles within their boundaries. We have a wealth of public information that is available to individuals, to stakeholders, and to communities through the process with step-by-step instructions on how they might reduce the risk in their communities, and they can find that information on Sustainable Resource Development's website.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont, followed by the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

### Centennial Education Savings Plan

**Mr. Herard:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently the Premier and the Minister of Advanced Education participated in the launch of the centennial education savings plan. Now, most of my constituents are pleased that this government is actively encouraging parents to start saving early for their children's postsecondary education, but they wish that the program applied to children born before 2005. To the Minister of Advanced Education: why are children born before 2005 not eligible for the initial \$500 grant of the centennial education savings plan?

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

**Mr. Hancock:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. That has been a concern raised by a number of parents calling my office and calling colleagues. I know that many parents, particularly those whose children were born in the previous months just before January 1 of this year, are concerned and raising that question, quite appropriately. But as with any program there has to be a start date.

Since January 1 of this year there have been approximately 4,500 births registered in this province. It's estimated that there will be 40,000 children born in our province in 2005. We've budgeted about \$20 million to provide these children with a head start on their postsecondary savings. We encourage parents to get to their banks or financial institutions and open those RESPs so that the money for those children that are eligible can be deposited in the RESPs.

Again, Mr. Speaker, programs have to start at some point in time. It's difficult to go back and change retroactively everything for everybody. So, unfortunately, we can't go back and start it retroactively. However, one of the things that I want to assure people is that one of the most important parts of the CESP program is not just the putting of money in the account but the recognition at birth that children will go on to get an advanced education.

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

**Mr. Herard:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: would the minister consider looking at the possibility down the road of making the three subsequent \$100 grants available to all holders of registered education savings plans in Alberta?

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

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a good idea. We have had some initial discussions about it and are trying to cost out to see what effect there would be if every child could have the \$100 supplement at age 8 and age 14. We'll certainly be looking at that to see whether we can manage to change the program in that way.

Again, Mr. Speaker, the program is about more than just the \$500 and the supplements of \$100 at those two ages. The program is about encouraging people to think about education when their

children are young and make sure that their children have an RESP in place. Statistics show that 80 per cent of children with RESPs in their names go on to postsecondary studies, but only 44 per cent of parents have actually opened an RESP for their children. There's lots of work to do.

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

**Mr. Herard:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question to the same minister: given that children born in 2005 and beyond who participate in the centennial education savings plan will be better able to afford postsecondary training, what is the government doing with respect to affordability for students of today?

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

**Mr. Hancock:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, that's a very important question. The Premier mentioned in his speech to the province in early February that we're very concerned about affordability in postsecondary. We're also very concerned about access. We're intending to create 15,000 new spaces in the next three years, 30,000 over six years, and 60,000 over the years of the 20-year strategic plan. But it has to be affordable.

Affordable is more than just tuition fees. Although we've indicated to the public postsecondary institutions that we will pay the costs of increase in tuition this year, we also have indicated that we're going to spend the course of this next year looking at affordability, looking at the costs of going to school, whether you're coming from Manyberries or whether you're coming from Fort Vermilion, whether you're moving from one urban centre to another. It's more than just tuition; it's also the cost of living and the cost of transportation.

So we're going to do that review. We're going to make sure that finances are not a barrier to a student getting an education.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright, followed by the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

### Tourism in Rural Alberta

**Mr. Griffiths:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently the government released the report *A Place to Grow*, Alberta's rural development strategy. My question is to the Minister of Economic Development. What is the minister planning to do in order to meet the recommendation that new tourism destinations be developed in rural Alberta?

**Mr. Dunford:** Mr. Speaker, the four pillars of tourism in this province have traditionally been, of course, Calgary and Edmonton and Banff and Jasper. Certainly, the mandate that we have taken on is to move the tourism activity further into rural Alberta, and I want to just reaffirm to everyone here in the House today that there's lots to see in rural Alberta. As a way to try to solidify my argument about lots to see, I would want to indicate that if I lived just east of Lethbridge and if I had a dog and that dog wanted to run away, I could watch him for three days. You can see lots in rural Alberta.

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

**Mr. Griffiths:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: what plan for the next year does the minister have to establish, expand, and market tourism opportunities in rural Alberta?

**Mr. Dunford:** I notice I have the attention of the House now. Thank you very much.

The product development and marketing arms of our ministry are

taking a look at some projects as we speak, and one of the ones that I am particularly excited about is around the Canadian badlands. Now, this is a project, of course, that would be primarily located east of highway 2. I think this is very important because we do get caught up, Mr. Speaker, in terms of the corridor and in terms of the mountains as we look at tourism here in the province. So when we start looking at east of highway 2, we look at the Canadian badlands. I might throw in at that particular point the Dinosaur Trail and other product that is likely to come on stream as we move forward.

We're very, very excited, then, about the opportunities for rural Alberta as it relates to tourism.

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

The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

### Beef Slaughter Facilities

**Mr. Hinman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to direct my question to the hon. minister of agriculture on the crisis of BSE. The question I have at this time is that no one understands the importance of value-added here in the province, yet many of the small packing plants that are trying to get up and going cannot receive the financial aid they need and backing. Would the government contemplate or consider making a dollar-to-dollar match for the small packing plants and have a first mortgage on those packing plants, that would enable them to get the funding up and running and, therefore, increase and have value-added here in Alberta?

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

**Mr. Horner:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and to the hon. member. Today I don't think it's fair to say that they cannot get the funding that they require. Those plants that have proper business plans, those plants that have the experience and the expertise to move forward and the markets are getting the financing that they need, and we're going to see those plants come to fruition very, very shortly.

Mr. Speaker, I said in public and many other times that anyone can build a slaughter facility. That's not the hard part. It's what you do with it afterwards that counts. This government is not going to pick winners or losers. We're going to stand behind our producers, and we're going to stand behind this industry.

**Mr. Hinman:** Last week the Premier made comments that it's not about science; it's about politics. Our beef is supposedly safe here, which I know it is. I eat it here in the province. Why has this government shut down farm gate sales and acts like there is a problem? In the past we've always had farm gate sales. We no longer allow it here in the province of Alberta, whereas B.C. still does.

2:40

**Mr. Horner:** Well, Mr. Speaker, one of the biggest things that has come out of this is that the world and consumers demand food safety. This government has always worked with the industry to develop the rules and regulations that will enable these plants to survive and thrive. I think the member is a little bit mistaken in some of the comments that he's making with regard to our shutting down this marketplace.

I'll say one other thing, Mr. Speaker. Part of our six-point plan, a major component of it, is the slaughter capacity. One of the things that the industry has told me at round-tables that I had with the industry in January is that we need to have a consensus amongst our producers as to food safety, food inspection, and that is what we

have. They like the rules that we have in place. We would like to harmonize with the other provinces, and that's another issue that we'll be addressing federally and provincially.

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

**Mr. Hinman:** Thank you. A final supplemental question regarding the banking system here. There are many farmers that are in a crisis situation now because of BSE. Would you urge the banks to postpone their foreclosure on those farming operations that have not been able to zero-base their operating loans because of BSE?

**Mr. Horner:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I would certainly like to see the specifics of any of those situations that might be urgent in nature. I can tell you that under our CAIS program the advanced payments and the final payments under the 2003 program are about 70 per cent complete. In many instances where the banks have decided that they for whatever reason do not want to wait for that program, we've been able to expedite the 2003 CAIS payments and, in fact, the advances under CAIS. The banks have been very, very receptive to that, and I intend to continue to dialogue with them and to work on making the CAIS program the risk management program for all producers in the province.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, today we were able to recognize 17 hon. members, which is very, very significant. So I want to congratulate all of you who have participated for your sharp questions and your sharp answers. A couple might get a note from me later in the day, but all in all pretty good.

Just so the Minister of Economic Development knows, while you may be able to see a dog running for three days outside of Lethbridge – I said the other day that I would start with a comment of the day – in March of 1906 the first Edmonton-to-Calgary automobile journey was undertaken in a 29-horsepower Ford. Twenty gallons of gasoline and a gallon of lubrication oil were used to complete the journey. Sounds like my Buick.

Hon. members, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

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

**Mr. Flaherty:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly the Albert Lacombe school from St. Albert. They have some special teachers here, Bruce Brown and Tina Warbis, and volunteers, which are key, Mrs. Labas and Mr. Lauckner.

Also, I understand that the hon. Doug Griffiths, Battle River-Wainwright, is getting married. He says a special hello to Brodie Ackerblade, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member will have observed earlier that I did like that to the hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports for mentioning the name of an hon. member. I have to do the same thing to the hon. Member for St. Albert.

**Mr. Flaherty:** Thank you, sir.

**The Speaker:** Okay. The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

**Mr. Danyluk:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you to the rest of the Assembly I am very honoured to introduce a rancher from northeastern Alberta. Shelley Dyck farms with her husband Bob and her family just northwest of St. Lina. Shelley is a previous school board trustee for many years, and she is now presently offering her contributions and efforts and knowledge by sitting on the zone 7 children's services board. So if I could ask this Assembly to honour Shelley Dyck if she would rise, please.

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

**Mrs. Jablonski:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I am very proud to rise in the House to introduce a number of guests who are here in support of Bill 202, PCAD, Protection of Children Abusing Drugs. Some of them braved the winter road conditions to be here, but they've been through much more difficult circumstances as they watched their loved ones sink lower into the depths of depression with drug abuse.

There is one that could not be here today, and his name is Tyler Bjornstad. Tyler wanted to be here today to support this bill, but he was not able to be here due to ongoing treatment. He also supports this legislation.

So here in our members' gallery today I would like to introduce Morgan Kingdom, Dallas Oeger, Alisha Pollar, Nick Smith, Ryan Stanley, and Miranda Zapisocki. If I pronounce your names wrong, I apologize. Those are youth that here today to support this bill.

From Parents Empowering Parents – if you'd like to stand when I call your name, then we'll be able to recognize you later on, parents – we have Audrey Bjornstad, Patrick Galenza, Kelly Parson, Barb White, Maralyn Benay, Tina Dow, and Gord Daniher. Other parents and family members from Parents Empowering Parents are Marguerite MacPherson, Lori Read, Pat LaSalle, Bill Baker, Aline Lafleur, Lisen Limon Falcon, Asia Castor, Samantha Castor, Karin Daniher, Denise Scorgie, Moyra Holliday, and Chris Uttley.

One more recovering youth who is present is Gillian Galenza, and I'd ask Gillian to stand as well. Anyone else here supporting Bill 202, if I do not have your name . . .

**The Speaker:** It's okay, hon. member. Thank you very much.

**Mrs. Jablonski:** Could you please welcome our members? Thank you.

**The Speaker:** I'm going to be leery of these introductions here. That went on seven minutes.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs on Recognitions.

head: **Recognitions**  
**North Saskatchewan River Rescue**

**Mr. Lukaszuk:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On February 24 two nine-year-old boys fell through the thin ice of the North Saskatchewan River and into the frigid waters. Brandon was able to pull himself out to safety, but Steven Hillman was not able to do the same. Luckily for him Jack King, Lawrence Yuskow, Patricia Bartolozzi, and Patrizio Bartolozzi were nearby to come to his rescue.

King immediately went to help, running into Yuskow, who then called 911, and the Bartolozzis happened upon King and Yuskow and immediately sprang into action. Patrizio risked his own life by crawling out onto the thin ice to drag Steven to safety. Without Patrizio's quick thinking and selfless drive to help a person in need, Steven might have suffered a different fate.

For their actions I would like to recognize Jack King, Lawrence

Yuskow, and Patricia Bartolozzi, and for risking his own life to rescue Steven Hillman, I would ask the Assembly to pay special tribute to Patrizio Bartolozzi. He truly is a role model and a hero.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

#### U of A Pandas Hockey Team

**Mr. Danyluk:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today and recognize some very outstanding athletes from the University of Alberta. These fine young women have been doing a single masterful job since October 13, 2001, and that is win. They have not lost a single game during this time frame and have just recently captured their fourth straight Canada West women's hockey title, beating the Manitoba Bisons 2 to 1 and 5 to 3 in a best of three final.

Their current unbeaten streak currently sits at 105 straight games. You very rarely see such dominance in sport at any level. This is just an outstanding feat considering the level of competition in women's university hockey.

The amount of dedication these women put forward towards both their athletic and academic commitments is to be admired and commended. They have had many close games, but these athletes just refuse to give up and have come together as a team and persevered.

I congratulate all the athletes, the head coach, coaches assistants, and parents of the present team and of all the teams since 2001 on a job well done.

Thank you very much.

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

2:50

#### Kyle Shewfelt

**Mr. Cao:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to speak about a once-hidden secret in the Dover community of the Calgary-Fort constituency. Indeed, it's a secret no more that a quiet young Albertan has brought top honour to Canada at the 2004 Olympics in Athens, the birthplace of the Olympic Games.

This young man is Kyle Shewfelt. He is the family product of Nola and Wes Shewfelt, together with his brother Scott. He is also the athletic product of the Altadore Gymnastic Club and personal coach Tony Smith and career coach Kelly Manjak. As you know, he has brought great pride and encouragement to Canadian athletes, and he is an great inspirational model for the young people in Alberta.

Just think about it. Olympics 2004: we have two gold medals won by Albertans.

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

#### U of A Golden Bears Volleyball Team

**Mr. Johnson:** Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise today to recognize the University of Alberta men's volleyball team. The Alberta Golden Bears captured their fourth national men's volleyball championship on Sunday in Quebec City, with an exciting 3 to 2 win over second seeded Trinity Western Spartans in one of the more closely contested national finals in history.

This accomplishment was made all the more exceptional by the fact that the national title caps off a brilliant season for the Bears in which they had an overall record of 33 wins and only two losses, and fourth year player Brock Davidiak of Edmonton earned MVP honours following his performance in the gold match final.

It takes a great deal of skill and dedication to win a championship

banner, and the Bears volleyball team is to be congratulated. This latest achievement builds on the university's outstanding reputation for good sportsmanship and excellence in athletics.

I know all members of this Assembly join me in extending their best wishes and congratulations to head coach Terry Danyluk and all members of the University of Alberta men's volleyball team.

#### Spitz Sylvan Lake Ice Marathon

**Mrs. Jablonski:** Mr. Speaker, it is a great pleasure for me to rise today and recognize the outstanding efforts of the Foothills Speed Skating Marathon Association in hosting the third annual Spitz Sylvan Lake Ice Marathon, an international event in Sylvan Lake on February 26.

Through the efforts of Mr. and Mrs. Evert van Benthem, Mr. and Mrs. Dirk Appel, and Mr. and Mrs. Peter Yss, this year's event was a huge success, with local volunteers hosting over 125 skaters from Europe and 50 from outside our province, with a total of 500 skaters participating in all the races. In fact, Mr. van Benthem is to the Netherlands in speed skating what hockey and Wayne Gretzky is to Canada.

It's hoped that this event, which honours the sport of speed skating and the Dutch heritage of these three men, will grow and become one leg of the Grand Prix 200-kilometre circuit. This would be a huge accomplishment for Sylvan Lake. The other three legs of this international event are in Sweden, Austria, and Finland.

This is truly a remarkable event, Mr. Speaker, and I would ask all honourable members to join with me in recognizing the volunteers and organizers who did such an outstanding job.

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

#### Flooding in Guyana

**Mr. Agnihotri:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In late December of 2004 and into the end of January this year the nation of Guyana endured four weeks of torrential rains which have resulted in widespread flooding. Many people lost their lives, and 50 per cent of the total population in Guyana have lost everything they had, their livestock and cash crops, and the rest have with limited water supply and inadequate medical assistance, all contributing to a high risk of disease.

As many as 75,000 people, almost 10 per cent of the total population there, still have standing water in and around their homes, raising fear of epidemics such as malaria and cholera. It's a huge challenge for the government as well as the people of Guyana to get the water out and the health resources in.

The flood disaster in Guyana brought powerful relief that was felt here in our homes and everywhere around the world. The lives lost cannot be replaced, but we certainly can reduce the suffering of victims of this disaster by helping them . . .

**The Speaker:** That's one minute, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

#### Pharmacist Awareness Week

**Mr. Elsalhy:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise again today, this time in recognition of national Pharmacist Awareness Week. The theme of this year's event is A Healthy Partnership: You and Your Pharmacist.

Pharmacists work in local drugstores, hospitals, nursing homes, and outpatient clinics. They receive a minimum of five years of university training in all aspects of human health and medication

management. The traditional role of a pharmacist as dispenser of medication has been replaced by a multifaceted, comprehensive role of primary care where patients and health professionals rely on a pharmacist as a drug expert, a health educator, and as a provider of disease management. Surveys have shown that pharmacists are the most trusted health professional and the most accessible health care providers in the community.

I have taken great pride, Mr. Speaker, in being a member of this profession that's essential to the health and well-being of Canadians for 10 years, and I would like to encourage Albertans to take a moment this week to reflect on the impact their local pharmacist has had on their lives in the last year whether he or she promptly filled a prescription, gave pertinent warning about a drug interaction, gave helpful advice, or was simply available when needed.

Thank you.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

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

**Mr. Eggen:** Yes, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling a petition signed by 400 Albertans from Clairmont, Fox Creek, Grande Prairie, High Prairie, Little Smoky, Red Deer, Stettler, Sunset House, Valleyview, Vermilion, Whitecourt, 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." This petition adds another 401 names to the one presented earlier, the total now being 802.

Thank you.

head: **Notices of Motions**

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

**Mr. Cernaiko:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to give oral notice of the following motion, which I understand will be taken into consideration tomorrow.

Be it resolved that when the Assembly adjourns at the regular hour on Wednesday, March 9, 2005, it shall stand adjourned until 1:30 p.m., Monday, March 14, 2005, to permit members' attendance at Thursday's memorial service for the deaths last Thursday of the four Royal Canadian Mounted Police officers in Mayerthorpe.

head: **Introduction of Bills**

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Community Development.

### **Bill 2 Alberta Centennial Medal Act**

**Mr. Mar:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me pleasure to rise to table Bill 2, being the Alberta Centennial Medal Act, for first reading.

This legislation creates a one-time recognition program this centennial year to honour the many exceptional Albertans who are the heart and strength of our province.

Thank you, sir.

[Motion carried; Bill 2 read a first time]

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

### **Bill 3 City of Lloydminster Act**

**Mr. Snelgrove:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to request

leave to introduce Bill 3, the City of Lloydminster Act, for first reading.

This legislated update framework under the City of Lloydminster Act clarifies the process for approval of a new charter for the city of Lloydminster. Mr. Speaker, it mirrors an act passed by the Saskatchewan government last year.

[Motion carried; Bill 3 read a first time]

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

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 3 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Innovation and Science.

### **Bill 4 Alberta Science and Research Authority Amendment Act, 2005**

**Mr. Doerksen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to request leave to introduce Bill 4, the Alberta Science and Research Authority Amendment Act, 2005.

This amendment follows up on a commitment made in the 2004 Speech from the Throne and allows for the establishment of an information and communication technology institute and a life sciences institute. These two industries are cornerstones of the Alberta innovation agenda and critical to our future economic prosperity and quality of life.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 4 read a first time]

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

### **3:00 Bill 5 Family Law Amendment Act, 2005**

**Mr. Stevens:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce for first reading Bill 5, the Family Law Amendment Act, 2005.

Amendments to the act change the joint guardianship provisions of the Family Law Act so that fathers and mothers are given a more equal opportunity to be guardians of their children. The act also clarifies the powers and responsibilities of persons who are guardians of children and introduces some housekeeping amendments to better define the Family Law Act.

[Motion carried; Bill 5 read a first time]

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

### **Bill 6 Fair Trading Amendment Act, 2005**

**Mr. Ducharme:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being the Fair Trading Amendment Act, 2005.

[Motion carried; Bill 6 read a first time]

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

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 6 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

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

**Bill 7  
Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2005**

**Ms Evans:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2005.

Several health statutes are amended within the content of this act. Clarification of certain definitions and recognitions of name changes of colleges are among the amendments that are enclosed.

[Motion carried; Bill 7 read a first time]

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

**Bill 201  
Smoke-free Places Act**

**Mr. Rodney:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and good afternoon. I rise today to request leave to introduce private member's Bill 201, the Smoke-free Places Act.

The purpose of Bill 201 is to create smoke-free environments in enclosed public and work places. I care very deeply about the health of all Albertans and am particularly concerned with the exposure of youth to second-hand smoke. The regulations set forth in this legislation will help the province embrace and promote healthy workplaces and safe public social areas for Albertans as well as provide a province-wide set of standards concerning smoke-free areas.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 201 read a first time]

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

**Bill 202  
Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Act**

**Mrs. Jablonski:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 202, the Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Act.

Bill 202 would give provincial authorities and parents the power to place children under the age of 18 into mandatory drug treatment programs. This bill would recognize that children who abuse drugs are victims and need help and protection and recognizes that families should be actively involved in ensuring the safety of their children, especially when involved in drug abuse. The outcome of 202 would be that children are safe and free from abuse and neglect, practise healthy behaviours, and are successful in their transition to adulthood.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 202 read a first time]

[Applause in the gallery]

**The Sergeant-at-Arms:** Order in the gallery!

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

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

**Mr. Eggen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of the NDP opposition's proposal for the rotation of questions in the Oral Question Period.

I would also like to table an article from the Peace River Block Daily News dated September 7, 2004, in which the Tender Beef Co-op indicates that their plans to build a slaughterhouse in Alberta were stymied by a "negative attitude" from the Alberta government.

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

**Mr. Tougas:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table an Alberta Fish and Game Association position paper on Métis hunting and fishing rights in Alberta.

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

**Mr. Backs:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table a letter from the Academy of Learning where they are marketing 18,000 workers from Venezuela, and they attest that these workers are Alberta job ready. They're engineers, rig workers, and tradesmen.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings this afternoon. The first is a letter dated February 16, 2005, from my office to the hon. House leaders in this Legislative Assembly. This is in regard to improving and reforming the Public Accounts Committee.

My second tabling is on behalf of Joanne Dykstra, who is writing from the Fulton Child Care Association in regard to the school closures in the neighbourhood of Edmonton-Gold Bar.

My third tabling is five copies of a petition. This is also from the Fulton Place community, and it is in regard to the public school closures which hopefully will not occur in Edmonton-Gold Bar. This petition is signed by 74 citizens.

Thank you.

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

**Dr. B. Miller:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table an e-mail from senior Enron officials regarding the destruction of electricity-trading tapes. This e-mail is dated March 2001.

head: **Tablings to the Clerk**

**The Clerk:** I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk on behalf of the hon. Mr. Renner, Minister of Municipal Affairs: pursuant to the Government Organization Act the Alberta Boilers Safety Association annual report 2003; the Alberta Elevating Devices and Amusement Rides Safety Association annual report, April 1, 2003, to March 31, 2004; the Petroleum Tank Management Association of Alberta annual report 2003. Pursuant to the Safety Codes Act the Safety Codes Council 2003 annual report and the authorized accredited agencies activity summary for April 1, 2002, to March 31, 2003.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre on a point of order.

**Point of Order  
Provoking Debate**

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Earlier in question period in an exchange between the Leader of the Official

Opposition and the minister of infrastructure, the minister of infrastructure claimed that the Liberal opposition had access to the government flight logs. Now, citing *Beauchesne* 417, in which questions and answers in question period should not be raising or provoking debate, I would argue that he very much opened that up to provoked debate.

The minister himself was the one who allowed the Official Opposition to examine the manifests but not the flight logs. He was very aware of the difference between the two. I would argue that in misleading the House, he did provoke debate in that given the sequence of events, he was very clear on giving us access to passenger manifests but not to the flight logs.

In fact, in a memo dated February 14, 2005, the minister of infrastructure states that the passenger manifests are available for viewing by appointment at the government hangar and then goes on to give contact information. We in fact followed those instructions, but we did not see flight logs. We saw manifests. Further in that memo of the 14th: if we wish to view additional documentation such as flight logs, one must file a formal request in accordance with the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. Again, that's written by the very member who is claiming that the Official Opposition had access to flight logs when very clearly we did not. I would ask that the member correct himself at this point in time.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation.

3:10

**Dr. Oberg:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, obviously in the answer that I gave, I did misspeak and said "logs" instead of "manifest." I believe that when you take a look at the Blues, I actually clarified it in the answer to the question. So if there's any harm done, I do apologize to the hon. member for bringing it up. Yes, indeed, they were given full access to the manifest logs because by virtue of the private information they are required to be under the auspices of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act.

**The Speaker:** I would think that we've now had clarification for this. This matter has now ended.

#### Submissions on the Rotation of Oral Questions

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, on Thursday last I rose in the House and indicated that failing, I guess, an agreement or advice provided to me by the various House leaders with respect to the rotation of question period, I would provide certainty for three days of the question period: Thursday last, today, and tomorrow. I indicated that at the conclusion of this part of our agenda for today I would invite comments from various individuals, particularly House leaders but not to say that other members cannot participate, on this whole question of the question period. What is certain is that our Standing Orders say that we have to have a 50-minute question period. That's it. I also invited comment with respect to Recognitions and the other item that we have another two days each week.

So I'm going to invite members who wish to participate. I'm seeking advice, and I'll take that advice and would come back with a ruling no later than 5:15 tomorrow afternoon that would provide us for the duration of the Legislature. This is not a debate. There is no need for cross-debate. Nobody has to get angry with one another. Just provide your thoughts, and we'll see where we go with it. You have to have some certainty. If there can't be any certainty in the House, well, the chair has no difficulty providing that certainty to the

members. If no one wants to make participation, that's fine with me too.

The hon. Official Opposition House Leader.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate you making this presentation of arguments public by asking that it be done in the Legislative Assembly, obviously recorded by *Hansard* and available for those in the gallery to witness the arguments that are put forward. I appreciate that.

We in the Official Opposition would like to present issues surrounding the number of questions and the order and rotation of question period for the 26th Legislature. In addition, with the Speaker's permission I would like to speak briefly on the format and the use of precedents in considering how the Speaker will determine how question period rotation shall proceed through the 26th Legislature.

Mr. Speaker, the Official Opposition believes that there should be a stronger role for Official Opposition private members during question period. I note that in *Marleau and Montpetit* they hold out that the primary function of question period is to hold the government accountable and the right to ask questions of the government is fundamental. Okay. That's *Marleau and Montpetit*, 415. Oral Question Period is the primary forum where the opposition may ask questions and seek accountability and information from the government. *Marleau and Montpetit*, 416, notes that question period is almost exclusively for opposition. The accountability function must be done primarily by opposition.

Now, Mr. Speaker, you are very aware, as most members of the House are, that Alberta is unusual in the degree to which private members who support the government are able to participate in question period both in terms of the number of questions and also in the order or rotation or positioning of the members' questions. In fact, the high participation of members supporting the government is acknowledged by the 2001 Speaker's ruling in which he notes that for private members supporting the government, their role is reflecting the contribution of individual members but also the number of government private members.

Now, in comparison to other jurisdictions – for example, Manitoba, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia – the primacy of opposition and the Official Opposition in question period is stronger, and government members are not in the regular rotation at all. But there are also examples where members supporting the government are in the rotation – for example, in Ontario and even in the federal House of Commons – in which one question is allowed from a government private member each day.

Mr. Speaker, private members supporting the government have important contributions to make, but given that the primary function of question period is to hold government accountable, I would argue that these members are not well positioned to fulfill this function. In fact, *Marleau and Montpetit* notes that their primary function – that is, the primary function of members supporting the government – is in fact to facilitate the government's agenda.

I note in *Beauchesne* 195 that "the chief function of the government party is to support the administration of the day in achieving its policy objectives." *Marleau and Montpetit*, 30, notes that the parties define political fault lines for debate and legislative activity, and again *Marleau and Montpetit*, 32: the tripartite functional division of the House is government, private members who support the government, and private members who oppose the government. I would argue that accountability, therefore, in question period must be done primarily by opposition. In other words, if question period is for accountability, then the Official Opposition should have the pre-eminent role in doing that.

It's been raised many times inside and outside of this Assembly that members supporting the government have special access to government that is not enjoyed by members of the Official Opposition or other opposition parties. There are a number of examples that have been raised inside and outside of the House; for example, the standing policy committees, which are funded by the regular budget. But no one other than members of government caucus are allowed to participate. These also rarely have open or public meetings, and no *Hansard* or minutes are kept.

Members of the government caucus have access to decision-making and information not shared with other private members. There is special access by members supporting the government to ministers by simple right of proximity and by being members of that caucus. Interestingly, just recently, according to the previous Speaker Schumacher, even bills from members supporting the government are now being treated more like government business. He says, and I quote: the government is trying to co-opt this process by requiring caucus scrutiny and consent for certain private members' bills, much the same as government bills. The point being made is that members supporting the government are treated differently and have more access to government and Executive Council than other private members not supporting the government.

Other changes in the last 12 years have affected the ability of the Official Opposition to function fully in other processes of the Assembly. The opportunities to comment in substantive ways have been reduced. For example, we've had speaking times which have gone from unlimited to 30 minutes to 20 minutes to 15 minutes. We increasingly have government bills which empower ministers to carry on virtually all business in the specified area through regulations and orders in council without returning to the public forum of the Legislature for additional scrutiny and comment. We have the time guillotine that is now available for use by the government to limit the amount of time that will be spent on debating government bills, and we sit relatively few days in comparison to other jurisdictions.

In other words, members supporting the government have other opportunities to question Executive Council or to have their views heard. The Official Opposition does not have this access and therefore must take the primary role in both position and number of questions in question period.

There is also a categorical distinction between the Official Opposition and other opposition that ought to provide us with a relative role beyond what simple numbers should provide. Position is of great importance. The role of the Official Opposition being pre-eminent among opposition members appears in *Marleau and Montpetit*, 33, and *Beauchesne* 196-97. This is evident in distribution of debate time, again *Marleau and Montpetit*, 33, and the Official Opposition being given particular rights in *Beauchesne* 196. The Official Opposition is equal to the opposition versus the recognition for other parties.

3:20

The Liberal opposition has laid out the argument for pre-eminence of the Official Opposition, but we believe strongly in supporting opportunity in question period for all opposition members, including single-member party representatives. Privileging the Official Opposition in terms of numbers of questions is not necessarily to disadvantage government. *Marleau and Montpetit*, 416, indicates that question period dominance by the Official Opposition serves both sides well. Government gets the last word even if the Official Opposition sets the agenda of questions.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to make clear that I am not arguing the abolition of questions being asked by private members who support

the government, but I am arguing that their position be lower in the rotation. If constituency-based questions need to be raised by members from the government side, their position in the rotation should follow all reasonable opportunities being exhausted by members of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Speaker, I am asking you to consider granting the Official Opposition significant number and positioning of questions. We ask the pre-eminence of the Official Opposition with five leader questions. In the last Speaker ruling the Speaker was wise by apportioning seven questions: three for the leader and four for other members of the Official Opposition. We ask that our now larger caucus be taken into consideration and ask for an additional four questions in positions high enough in the rotation to be likely to be heard each day. Thus, four questions plus the five leader questions we've asked for, for a total of nine questions daily. Given the 24 government ministries from which accountability and information need be sought, this would give us a ratio of three questions for every eight ministries.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to comment briefly on the Speaker's memo of the 2nd of March indicating retention of the prohibition of preambles before supplementary questions. The lack of a preamble in supplementals is an advantage to the government side because opposition parties are unable to react to earlier answers and reframe subsequent questions to hold ministers accountable for the statements they've just made. In other words, there's no ability through use of a preamble to respond to the answer just given. There's no ability to put a response on the table to note that it was off topic or didn't answer the question that was asked. So there's no ability for the Official Opposition to contextualize the supplementary question as a further question in response to the answer given. We're not allowed to refer to the answer the minister just gave us at all. I would ask that if the 45-second rule is going to be put in place, the Speaker please consider removing the prohibition against the use of a preamble on supplementary questions.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, precedent, which I know is a very important part of what you consider. I know that in other contexts there has been some reference to the 1986 rotation of questions and positioning. If I may ask that we avoid the search for selective precedents. The rule of precedents must take in all relevant precedents including the most recent, and all other things being equal, the most recent precedents trump older precedents. The more recent precedents will be more attuned to the changes that have happened. Precedents should favour orderly change according to established principles of stability, certainty, and evolutionary progress of parliamentary traditions and practices. All circumstances should be considered.

This Assembly has had many changes since 1986. Although the Official Opposition had 32 members in 1993, they had only three leader questions. I argue that much has changed since then, and I've already mentioned some of those differences: the creation and institutionalization of the standing policy committees, the shorter speaking times, increasing government bills passed which take parliamentary scrutiny outside of the Legislature and subsuming action into orders in council or regulations, and Speaker Schumacher's point about government giving their private members special attention and resources not available to other members.

I argue that in the context of the last election, in which Albertans are looking for a stronger opposition voice, it would be counter to that expressed democratic will to reduce the number of Official Opposition questions. I'm not arguing that any grouping of private members should lose questions, but I am arguing that the Official Opposition should be pre-eminent, followed by third party and other party representatives. Government members should be able to raise their constituency-based questions at the end of the rotation.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to argue this.



**The Speaker:** The hon. leader of the NDs.

**Mr. Mason:** Yes, please, Mr. Speaker. I'm speaking on behalf of our House leader, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, who unfortunately fractured his ankle yesterday and is unable to be with us for a few days. So I beg the indulgence of the House to speak on his behalf.

Mr. Speaker, last week you noted the importance of question period, citing *Marleau and Montpetit*. Your citation noted in the western parliamentary tradition the importance of question period for holding members of Executive Council accountable. By tradition this method of accountability is particularly important for members of the opposition parties. In fact, question period as a means to hold members of Executive Council is at the very core of what it means to belong to a loyal opposition party.

It is not our position that the government private members should be excluded from question period. Our position is, however, that the opposition parties ought to be given the first opportunity to set the tone and the direction of question period. I would like to emphasize that the question period belongs not only to the Official Opposition but also to other recognized opposition parties. As a result of last November's election the Alberta NDP elected four members to this Assembly, thereby becoming a recognized opposition party. As such, it is the submission of the NDP opposition that the achievement of recognized party status warrants a change in the question period rotation in the 26th Legislature.

Mr. Speaker, it is my submission that the most important criteria upon which the question period rotation should be based are the precedents in this Legislative Assembly. A second criteria is the practices of the federal Parliament and the practices in other provincial Legislatures where there are recognized third parties.

In fact, in the history of this Assembly there is an exact parallel to the situation we find ourselves in in this 26th Legislature. Between 1986 and 1989, in the 21st Assembly of the Legislature of Alberta, the proportion and number of seats between the two recognized opposition parties was exactly as it is now. Only the distribution of the seats was reversed in 1984. The NDP was the Official Opposition, with 16 seats, while the Liberals were the third party, with four seats. Between 1986 and 1989 the Liberal party opposition, with four seats, was given the third and sixth main questions in question period. Given the exact parallel with today's 26th Legislature, we submit that the NDP opposition is entitled to ask the third and sixth main questions.

Moreover, Mr. Speaker, in every jurisdiction across Canada today where there is a recognized third party, that party has no lower than the third main question in question period. Currently in the federal Parliament the Official Opposition Conservatives have the first two main questions; the third party, the Bloc Québécois, has the third main question; and the fourth party, the NDP, has the fourth main question. In the Ontario Legislature the third party, the NDP, receives the third and fourth main questions each day. Again, these precedents require that the NDP opposition in this Legislature should receive at least the third question each day.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to make a couple of points relative to issues raised in the submission of the Liberal caucus, which asked for great scope for the Official Opposition as opposed to the opposition in general. Actually, under *Beauchesne*, section 196, there are limited additional roles specified for the Official Opposition.

**The Speaker:** Hon. leader, just a second, please. It may be more prudent here this afternoon to make submissions on behalf of what the hon. member and his party believes. I don't want this to turn into a debate. If the hon. member then questions what the hon.

Official Opposition House Leader says, there may be then a desire to counteract. So let's just stick to what it is we want to have delivered here today.

Thank you.

**Mr. Mason:** Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Then I'll carry on.

Based on the precedents that I have cited in our submission, the NDP opposition proposes the following rotation for question period for main questions: first question to the Liberal caucus, second question to the Liberal caucus, third question to the NDP opposition, fourth question to a government member, fifth question to the Liberal caucus, sixth question to the NDP opposition, seventh question to a government member, eighth question to the Liberal caucus, ninth question to the NDP opposition, and all subsequent questions should rotate between government members and the Official Opposition.

At least once a week the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner should be given the seventh question, which would bump all subsequent questions one down.

3:30

This rotation would provide government members with an opportunity to ask four questions in the top 12 and five questions in the top 15. The Liberals would have seven questions in the top 15, which is the same as what they had from 2001 to 2004. I would like to note, Mr. Speaker, that in 2001 the size of the Liberal caucus was cut in half. At that time, however, the number of Liberal questions was not similarly cut in half. It follows, then, that simply because the Liberal numbers have now increased, their questions should not automatically increase as well. In fact, the most significant change between this Legislature and the 2001 Legislature is that today there are two recognized opposition parties whereas there was only one in the previous Legislature.

To conclude, therefore, the most exact precedent for today's Legislature is the question period rotation that was in place when the composition of the opposition made up of recognized parties was identical to what it is today. Such an identical composition can be found in 1986, in the 21st Legislature, when the Liberal opposition, with four members, had the third and sixth questions. We ask you to reply on this precedent, Mr. Speaker, and in your ruling provide the third and sixth main questions to the NDP opposition each day.

I just want to make a short comment with respect to time limitations, which have been informally enforced. This has produced, I think, a tremendous improvement already in our question period. Today I think we set, at least in my limited experience, a record in the number of questions that were asked, and it didn't detract at all from the thoroughness of the answers which are sometimes given in this House. So, Mr. Speaker, I would wholeheartedly endorse that change and thank you for making it.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Hinman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Not wanting to be repetitive on the arguments that have been brought up, I'd just like to bring up a few points. I feel that Albertans and this Assembly would best be served by the more voices that come forward, the better off we will be. It is important that the government is asked questions from those that aren't part of the government. I do feel it's critical. I am the only MLA elected in the rural – I feel that that's an important and significant role that I need to play for rural Albertans. We received close to 9 per cent of the vote, and I think that in those consider-

ations it would be appropriate to allow more than one question a week. It's also worth noting that 53 per cent of Albertans did not vote for the current government and would add to the weight of why it is important that those who are not part of the government get to ask them questions.

I think it would be fitting to be able to receive one question a day, when we look at the precedent set in the past, and if that were to be in the ninth spot, I think that would be appropriate. To look on the long side, with 21 opposition members being elected, the ninth question every other day to me would be extending it the longest. We should be allowed to ask questions at least once every other day.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to participate in this discussion as well. First of all, let me congratulate you on your election as Speaker to this 26th Legislature. This is your third election as Speaker and clearly sets you out as one of the pre-eminent guardians of the legislative process and the parliamentary tradition in our world of parliamentary democracies.

Mr. Speaker, the role of the Legislature has at least three very important functions in a parliamentary democracy. We of course debate and pass bills brought before the House, primarily brought by government but also brought by private members. We have been leaders in the parliamentary world in promoting the role of private members with a system for debate and voting which ensures that private members' bills have the opportunity to be debated and the opportunity to become law, a system, I might note, which was promoted by yourself when you had the role of Government House Leader, attaining a far-reaching agreement between all House leaders on that point.

As a Legislature one of our other very important functions is to pass supply. The Legislature has the ultimate authority over the public purse. Indeed, a good portion of each session is dedicated to budget, Committee of Supply, and appropriation bills to ensure that interim supply, supply, and supplementary supply are all voted by this House.

A third very important role, Mr. Speaker, is accountability. The government promotes business to the House, requests supply from the House, and is accountable to the House. Part of that accountability is the daily question period, an opportunity for members of the Legislature to seek information from the government and to hold the government accountable for its actions by questioning ministers of the Crown in the areas of their responsibility.

While often the Legislature is viewed as government and opposition, I submit, Mr. Speaker, that it's actually made up of government accountable to the Legislature, all members of the Legislature, some of whom have a particular role as members of the Official Opposition, some of whom choose to sit with others as recognized parties, some of whom sit alone as independents, and, yes, some who choose to sit with the governing party.

But all of those members who are not part of Executive Council, not just those who sit in opposition, have the responsibility of the Legislature to hold the government accountable and to represent their constituencies by raising issues, seeking information, and questioning action. The participation of all private members in question period is a critical role of a private member, and every private member deserves equitable access to that particular portion of our daily travail.

The opposition's function in parliament is well known. It's a role which has been recognized in part by affording the Official Opposition and other recognized opposition parties the pre-eminent position

each day in question period. But that role, Mr. Speaker, is not so overarching that it can be allowed to push out or overwhelm the very legitimate right of all private members. Question period is not in our tradition the exclusive domain of the opposition.

It should be noted that with 50 minutes allotted for question period, our Legislature is among the forefront in the country in meeting the opportunity for accountability. Some are as short as 15 minutes. You have, Mr. Speaker, indicated both in your ruling in 2001 and in your comments on Thursday a preference for brevity in questions and answers, which would allow for the maximum utilization of the full 50 minutes that this House devotes to question period each day. While specific application of time rules may inhibit important or appropriate questions or answers, for the most part, assuming the framing of the question is not excessively inflammatory or inaccurate, requiring significant context for an answer – and, really, that should not be necessary – I certainly would accept that a judicious application of time parameters will ensure that we maximize the number of opportunities for private members each day.

So how should the question period for the 26th Legislature be structured? Well, Mr. Speaker, on the basis outlined above, there should be two principles observed. All private members should have a fair opportunity to participate, and the opposition, due to their particular role, should have the priority position daily. That, in fact, is our tradition.

Mr. Speaker, the last two Legislatures dealt fairly and appropriately with this, and we would propose that the rotation utilized for each of those Houses, one of which, in 1997, was very similar in makeup to this one, was appropriate and ought to continue; that is, the first three questions to the Official Opposition, the fourth to the third party, with a subsequent rotation between the government and Official Opposition until the third party receives an additional question as the 11th question, and the private members on the government side receive all questions after 13.

We would submit that the independent member should be eligible for every 58th question, as has been accorded to other members who have attended as independent members in earlier Legislatures, and presumably would fall into the rotation on the appropriate day after the first four questions or within the first nine questions.

With the fact that the New Democratic Party now has official party status, we would not object to a rotation which would see them participate earlier in the rotation, somewhat as they propose. We would suggest, however, that it should be the first two questions to the Official Opposition, the third question to the third party, the fourth question to private members on the government side, the fifth question to the Official Opposition, the sixth to the third party, the seventh to members on the government side, and then a rotation between private members on the government side and Official Opposition members to 14, with any subsequent after 14 being allocated to government members, the 58th to the independent member after the primary rotation on the day that his entitlement comes up.

Either proposal, Mr. Speaker, assuming 14 questions a day, would result in PC private members, with 63.7 per cent of the 58 private members in this House, having 20 questions per week while their numbers would warrant 36 and would have them participating only after four or five opposition questions being raised, which would answer the principle of fairness and a pre-eminence of the opposition role.

**3:40**

The Official Opposition, with 27 per cent of the private members in this House, would have 28 questions per week, including the first

two or three per day and three of the first five. Their numbers would only warrant 15. So the allocations are almost double what they would be entitled to normally on a simple percentage basis. The third party, with 6.9 per cent of the seats in the House, would have eight questions, whereas their entitlement on that percentage would be four, with either one or two in the first, depending on which of the two suggested rotations you selected. The independent member would get one question per week, almost right in line with his .95 per cent of private member status.

These proposals are fair to the opposition members in that they get almost twice as many questions as numbers warrant and the front end of the question period rotation each day. It's fair to the private members on the government side in that while a smaller number of questions go to them than warranted, it continues to provide the opportunity for them to do their job, equally important to that of opposition members, in getting information important to their constituents, highlighting issues important to their constituents, and holding the government accountable on behalf of their constituents.

Some would suggest that private members who are members of the governing party have better access already. With respect, such arguments fail to distinguish the important difference in role and function that this House stands for. Every member of this House has an equal role and an equal responsibility to represent their constituents. Some may be asked to take responsibility as a member of Executive Council. By doing so, they may feel that they can take on that role and better represent their constituents and all Albertans, but it comes at some loss of their individual role as a member in the House.

Members decide, and it's their decision alone, to join a caucus perhaps in order to be more effective as a group than as an individual. They may agree to meet as a caucus and make decisions as to how they will handle themselves as a group. They may do any number of things outside this House which they believe will make them a more effective member and a better representative. None of that, Mr. Speaker, detracts from the individual responsibility of a member for his or her own voice and for his or her own vote and for his or her own actions and for his or her own right to participate to the fullest in this House regardless of whether they've chosen to align themselves with the governing caucus or an opposition party caucus or to remain independent.

It's for that reason, Mr. Speaker, that it would not be appropriate or desirable to move away from the rotations you previously determined in 1997 and again in 2001, which have served this House and its members well, when the opposition had similar numbers to that reflected in the House today and when the numbers were lower. In other words, the fact that a smaller opposition in the last Legislature was afforded significantly more questions than their numbers warranted to acknowledge that particular role of the opposition is not a reason to grow that number of questions because they have now risen back up to the numbers they previously had in 1997.

Mr. Speaker, question period is important for all members of the House. There is a pre-eminent role for the opposition. That's why they get the first three or four questions in the front end of the rotation. The proposal to maintain the status quo or modify it gently to acknowledge the official party status of the NDP by bringing their second question earlier in the rotation would recognize that pre-eminent role of the opposition. Having the rotation as we've suggested would clearly recognize that each and every private member of this House has a valuable and important role and responsibility to their constituents and to Albertans to seek information and to hold the government accountable regardless of the side of the House on which they sit.

**Mr. Chase:** Mr. Speaker, in order to increase democratic participation in this House and to involve the electorate to a greater degree, which I think is what we would all believe in, we have to involve them through the question period. Voters traditionally in Alberta and, I guess, in other provinces as well have less than a 50 per cent turnout, or a very small turnout. In order to involve people and give them the kinds of transparency and accountability that I believe is necessary, the opposition must have more questions.

It's been noted previously that oppositions together received more votes than the government itself. The first past the post system works against members of the opposition. What we require is the opportunity to ask the questions that the people have elected us to ask. The government has all the resources. It also has what I consider to be a large cloak, a cloak of secrecy, and that is FOIP. So often we request of the government to detail a position such as the flight logs, and we're unable to do that, so we have to go through the long and involved FOIP process. Question period is our one shot at democracy, and I believe the opposition needs a larger share in that position.

Thank you.

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

**Ms Haley:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to get up and make a few brief comments. I appreciate very much the comments that I've heard from all hon. members today. I guess I would like to speak just on behalf of some of the private members on the government side. We, too, have constituents and issues that occur and are raised by our constituents to us. It is just as important for us as a private member, whether we sit on the government side or not, to be able to in fact ask those questions. The truth is that we get very few opportunities to ask those questions in a question period format to show our constituents that we, too, are working.

Believe it or not, we all work very hard. I recognize that you work hard as well, but I need to be able to assure my constituents that I'm not just sitting here day after day not doing anything. They ask me a question, and question period is my opportunity as well. It's very competitive in my caucus to try and get an opportunity to ask a question because, generally speaking, the opposition, both parties, have that opportunity well before us. So you have the opportunity to raise the bigger issues. We tend to raise issues that are more relevant to our own constituencies but equally important to us and to our constituents. We do have a majority of members, but we also have a minority of questions. So when you talk about democracy, it's just as important for us to be a part of that democratic process that question period affords us.

I remember in 1993 when question period was extended to its current length. Probably at that point, at least, it was the longest in Canada. That was done in recognition of a larger, more substantive opposition that we wanted to show that we had respect for, and we still have respect for the opposition parties although they are not at 32 members, which they were at that time.

I think that the current system, Mr. Speaker, whether it were to change the order of questions to two and one or stay with three and one for the opposition parties matters not to me from my perspective. But as a private member of this caucus and as somebody who served as the government caucus whip for over five years, my job was in fact to make sure that my private members, when I was doing my job as whip, had an equal opportunity to try and have their voices heard in here. I believe that the quality of their questions was just as good or better than anything that the opposition raised. We challenge our ministers just as much as they do. I would sincerely hope that when you make your ruling, our members are treated the

same even though it's a lesser number than I think we're entitled to, that at least we end up with no less for our caucus.

Opposition members indicate that we have all of these advantages. Yes, we have standing policy committees. They are advisory bodies to ministers. It gives us an opportunity to review policy. That's our job. Government's job is to bring forward policy, and as a private member I wish to have the opportunity to participate in that policy direction. So, yes, SPCs are in fact for government members.

Under FOIP, as I recall, there were numerous members on the original FOIP committee from the opposition party, including a distinguished lawyer, Mr. Gary Dickson, that helped to write the rules of FOIP that we all have to live with, whether we like them or not. I think there are many of us that wish it had never been invented, but it's there. It's not just about freedom of information. It is, in fact, about protection of privacy, and that must be respected.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I know that if there's one thing I can count on, it's that you will in fact be fair when you make your final ruling on this decision, and I appreciate your consideration of my colleagues that are private members on the government side as well.

Thank you.

3:50

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

**Dr. Pannu:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for this opportunity. I'll be brief. I'd like to make a few comments here. My colleague the leader of the NDP opposition in the House, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, has made the argument based on precedent: first and foremost, the precedent of this House, and, secondly, precedents in other sister Legislatures across this country.

I've tried to search for a precedent in the history of this Legislature where when there is more than one recognized opposition party present in the House, the Official Opposition would have as many as the first five questions. There's no precedent that I can find in the 100-year history of this particular Legislature which gives the Official Opposition in the context of three or more parties being present in the House the first five questions. So that's one point that I want to reiterate.

Associated with that, of course, is the arrangement that this House had in 1986. That, I think, needs to be re-emphasized. The number of seats held between the two recognized opposition parties, the NDP and the Liberal at the time, were 16 plus four, or 20. We have the same, exact situation now except that the parties have reversed their positions. Liberals have 16 seats, and NDP have four seats. So I think the arrangement that was fair and appropriate and worked well in the Legislature of the 1980s is the arrangement that we are proposing, at the minimum, should be the guide.

Going outside of the precedents and history of this Legislature, my colleague from Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood has drawn our attention to the way the House of Commons as currently constituted uses the question period. I'm not going to repeat that; he is on record saying that. I just want to add one minor additional precedent to it. In the current Ontario Legislature, where there are three recognized parties – the ruling party and the Conservative Party and the NDP as a third party but a recognized party – the arrangement for the question period is as follows. The Official Opposition in the Ontario Legislature receives the first two questions; the third and fourth questions are then available to the NDP as the third recognized party in this Legislature. So that's another precedent, Mr. Speaker, that we should draw upon from a sister Legislature in our country.

With these points made, I think I would simply say that we should pay attention to the principle of precedents and that we should pay attention to the principle of fairness, both of which, I think, are incorporated in the proposal that the NDP opposition has submitted, with respect, to you and to the House, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

**Dr. Brown:** Mr. Speaker, the Opposition House Leader has argued in favour of a diminished role for private members and, in particular, those private members who happen to be affiliated with the governing party. Private government members are not constrained by solidarity with the government policy, as are members of the Executive Council. In fact, by custom and tradition members of the backbench are free to criticize government policy. I would respectfully submit that the private members, including private government members, have equal rights to represent their constituents and their electors in this House and to raise their concerns before the House and to be their voice in this House. I would therefore argue in favour of the status quo in terms of rotation of the questions.

**The Speaker:** Are there additional comments from members? Anyone else want to participate? The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

**Mr. Knight:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just a short comment with respect to the issue. There have been some statements made with respect to the low number of voters at provincial elections. The number is somewhere less than 50 per cent. Given that that might be a fact and given that the boundary review commission divided the 83 seats equitably, the government represents 62 of 83 ridings, or 75 per cent of the 50 per cent plus of Albertans who never took the opportunity to go to the polls.

Therefore, it follows that the private members in the House are with their questions representing 75 per cent of the people that didn't take an opportunity to vote. The opposition members are representing 25 per cent of that same group of citizens. I think that it speaks for itself, that perhaps we're being, I would suggest, more than liberal with our suggestion that the questions remain as our leader has suggested.

**The Speaker:** I thank all hon. members. I shall take this input. The table officers and I will do some huddling.

Statistically it's very easy to find out the calculation of exactly how things have gone in the past in the province of Alberta. A number of members talked about 1986. No member mentioned in the discussion of 1986 that other parties had a right to ask a supplemental question to the original question being asked, and I gather that while there was some discussion about 1986, no one has suggested that we might go back to that. I was here in 1986. It meant that the Official Opposition had the right to ask a question, they could have two supplementals, and any other party could ask a question as well, so it was quite a free-for-all in the Assembly on any given day. It sure did make some excitement for the chair, but that's probably not what anybody is anticipating today.

We've got variances, going from the Official Opposition saying that they want the first five questions to the government and the third party basically saying that it should be two and two to a variety of other things with it. We will use the best wisdom that we possibly can to try and come up with a conclusion. There will not be any heart attacks or anything else when this decision is made. It will be made for certainty, and it will be made in the best traditions that we can hopefully come up with.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Written Questions**

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

**Mr. Stevens:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Proper notice having been given on Thursday, March 3, it's my pleasure to move that written questions appearing on today's Order Paper do stand and retain their places.

[Motion carried]

head: **Motions for Returns**

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

**Mr. Stevens:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Proper notice having been given on Thursday, March 3, it's my pleasure to move that motions for returns appearing on today's Order Paper do stand and retain their places.

[Motion carried]

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

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

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are no bills available for discussion given that bills 201 and 202 were only introduced today, and it would require unanimous consent of the House to move to discussion of Bill 201 at second reading. Now, it may not be appropriate for the House to have that unanimous consent given that most members, I presume all members other than the one introducing it, have just seen the bill for the first time today.

But, Mr. Speaker, I'd ask, if it's the pleasure of the House, to have unanimous consent to proceed to second reading on the same day as first reading of Bill 201.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, if you look at your Standing Orders, 73(1) says, "Every Bill shall receive three separate readings on different days before being passed." What is being asked today is to waive this particular ruling, if I understand the hon. Government House Leader correctly.

[Unanimous consent denied]

4:00

**Mr. Hancock:** Well, Mr. Speaker, given that we do not have private members' bills to proceed with this afternoon, then I would ask that the House waive the standing rules and allow us to proceed to government business for this afternoon to address the motion in reply to the Speech from the Throne because that is properly on the table with the unanimous consent of the House.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, if you look at your Standing Orders, Standing Order 8(1) gives the Routine, and the Routine on Monday provides for certain things. What's being asked now by the Government House Leader is that the Assembly give unanimous consent to waive that so we might now proceed to Consideration of the Lieutenant Governor's Speech from the Throne.

[Unanimous consent granted]

**The Speaker:** Then we shall now proceed with the reply to the Lieutenant Governor's throne speech.

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.

[Debate adjourned March 3]

**The Speaker:** Hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, you were last up, if you wanted to continue.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to take this opportunity to respond to the Speech from the Throne. I'd like to start out by welcoming all members of the Assembly, particularly the new members of the Assembly, to the absolutely fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre, in which you are now sitting. So welcome to you, one and all. I'm very proud of my constituency of Edmonton-Centre, as many of you know, and I take every possible opportunity to promote it and welcome you to it. It's pretty special to have the Legislative Assembly in your constituency, so I like to tout that when I get the chance.

I'd also like to thank the electors living in Edmonton-Centre. They were very supportive and generous to me during this last election and gave me a whopping majority, and I really appreciate that vote of confidence. Very nice to have. I've really enjoyed serving two terms, and I'm very much looking forward to the third term, that I'm now in.

The last group that I would like to thank is those on my campaign team that worked so hard to elect me. I think it's appropriate that I also recognize and thank them very much and of course, my family, who are fairly long-suffering in this, but I sure appreciate their support.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Now, we've had quite a bit of reflecting, this being the 100th year of Alberta, and I take a perverse pleasure in acknowledging that in all of this casting back 100 years, in fact we're casting back to a Liberal government. It was the innovation and vision for the 100 years that was set in place by, in fact, the Liberal government. So I know the members opposite don't like to acknowledge that when they talk about what was going on 100 years ago, but it was a Liberal government, and I'm proud of that. I'm proud that they did things like start the University of Alberta. It shows that Liberal commitment to higher education and to moving forward and trying to get as much access for as many people as possible to a postsecondary education. I'm proud of them that they put in place a number of public utilities and regulations for public utilities. I'm proud of the then Liberal government for having put some human rights, particularly women's rights, in place. Very appropriate.

We are also starting this 26th Legislature having come out of an election, obviously, so we've all had lots of opportunity – or at least I hope we did – as we were door-knocking to listen very carefully to what our constituents were telling us. What I looked for in the Speech from the Throne, what I was hoping to hear was that energy,

that vitality that comes from saying: "Alberta is a good place to be. No, Alberta is a great place to be. But Alberta could be extraordinary. It could be mind-boggling. It could blow you away." I was looking for that kind of vision, that kind of excitement, that kind of planning, that kind of management, and I got autopilot. I got announcements that we've heard in two or three press releases over the last four months. I got something that was in an infomercial on TV. I was so disappointed, Mr. Speaker, because really that's what my constituents told me.

We have a unique opportunity right now to capitalize on our luck and on our good fortune. We're very lucky to be born and walking around on a chunk of geography that spews oil out of it. Some of us were lucky enough to be born here, and others were smart enough to move here. Nonetheless, that's where a good deal of our money comes from, and we need to recognize that. It has given us a surplus, and the Liberals want to see that not frittered away.

Some of you will remember a bumper sticker that was around, I think, in the '70s. Mr. Speaker, you'll have to bear with me while I paraphrase a bit because the original of the bumper sticker is not printable in *Hansard* to be read. But it went something along the lines of: dear Lord, please send me another oil boom, and this time I promise not to fritter it all away. That's the position that we're in. We are in an extraordinary position right now. We are so lucky to have this, and we need to be making sure that that money is not frittered away. Very, very important, and I heard that repeatedly from my constituents.

So what did they want done with this money? Well, they wanted to see prudent management of those assets. They really liked the Liberal idea of a surplus policy in which we had 35 per cent of future surpluses going into a postsecondary endowment fund, and don't you know it: Bill 1. Gosh, sounds like they heard it. I don't mind. I don't mind sharing good Liberal ideas with the government caucus. If it's a good idea, they should take it from us. Credit where credit's due. I'm happy to share that with you. It's a gift.

People also really like the idea of putting an additional 35 per cent of any future surpluses into the heritage fund to strengthen the heritage fund. That's become a keystone for us in our belief of who we are as Albertans and how we handle our resource revenue.

We had an additional 25 per cent going into infrastructure, which is badly needed, and we recognize that – so that was a catch-up fund – and a final 5 per cent going into a special endowment fund for universities, specifically going into the humanities and the arts. It's recognizing that there's opportunity that's being capitalized on, rightly so, by the sciences and technology sectors of the universities. They're attracting a lot of outside money and research grants. Good; go for it. But the arts and the humanities don't attract that same kind of outside assistance, and the Liberals felt that they're important. We need archaeologists and philosophers and artists and writers and speakers of other languages as much as we need scientists, and we wanted to make sure that there was some redress of the imbalance there. So that was the final 5 per cent.

You know, one interesting thing I will note is that people were pretty clear with me that they did not approve of having public lands sold off. That's been a bit of a move that we've been seeing from the government side, and I just want to state that very clearly: my constituents were not in favour of public land being sold off. I just want to get that on the record there.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I've got about six groups that live in my constituency with very particular interests in the throne speech. The first group is people on AISH. I represent a downtown riding. I tend to have a fairly high portion of people who receive AISH benefits and live downtown. They're closer to the support services that they need. Also, we have an older housing stock, so it tends to be a cheaper housing stock, and given the low rates of AISH, they need

that cheaper housing stock to be able to afford their rent. So my people on AISH were looking at that throne speech saying: when do we get the money? It's as simple as that.

4:10

I think February 28 was the 100th day that this government has been in power since its election on November 22. What's the delay? Where's the money? They said that they were going to increase the AISH rates. Where is it? How long are they going to make these people wait? Another month? Another two months? Another six months? How long do they have to wait? We've recognized that the rates are insufficient, so why are we delaying in finding that money and getting it in a cheque and getting it into their hands? It's really, in my opinion, quite unforgivable. So that's one thing we were looking for.

I also have a number of people that have mental health issues, and again they tend to cluster downtown for the same reasons: they're closer to services and the housing stock. A number of them are homeless; there's no question. They just don't have the coping capacity that others do, and they're looking for more community support. A long time ago we deinstitutionalized. We threw them all out there and said: the community is the better place for them to be; we'll put the supports in the community. We have never come to the point where there is sufficient community support for those individuals, and I continue to look to this government to make sure that happens.

Mr. Speaker, I also have a lot of seniors that live in my constituency, and they have a number of concerns. One would be funding of seniors' centres, which is going to give them access to programming, wellness, initiatives, exercise programs, mental health programming, and that they can get out and socialize with people; they don't just sit at home all day. I continue to press the government to make sure that they develop a new funding model which would include seniors' centres.

The seniors are also really concerned, as are their families, with the state of long-term care. I'm aware that the Auditor General is doing an audit, but I understand he's doing an attest audit, not a value-for-money audit, which I'm disappointed to hear because I don't think it's going to give us very much information about the state of things. In particular, we would like to see standards of long-term care that go right across the board and affect not only the smaller group homes with two or three seniors being looked after but also the various kinds of institutions that we now have. I think that's very important. We've got to put some attention to that.

Mr. Speaker, no surprise to anyone that's sat in here, but I also have a large gay and lesbian community that lives in Edmonton-Centre, of whom I am very proud. They look to having human rights in Alberta upheld. They are protected in the Alberta Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act. They look to having the government uphold those rights for them. In particular, in that community they are very concerned about a very high level of suicides among their young people. They say to me: you've gotta understand, Laurie, that when politicians and leaders in the community get up and say things about people who are gay and lesbian in a way that is not positive, that really affects particularly young people who could be really struggling with their identity. I think we need to be very careful about that. I don't want to see those suicide rates get any higher. I'd like to see them get lower, and I'm just asking for respect.

Human rights are not a finite bucket of rights. In extending a human right to one group or individual, you don't take away rights from others. That's not how it works. It's not a finite bucket of rights. If you extend human rights to others, you simply have them

join a loving family of individuals that are in this province. You don't take something away from someone else, and I wish we'd quit talking about it that way.

Mr. Speaker, I also have a large constituency of artists, who are the hardest working, proudest Albertans, who struggle away without the benefit programs that are available to many other groups. They don't qualify for unemployment insurance. Unless they're truly strapped, they don't get onto social assistance or Alberta Works or whatever it's called now. They tend to subsidize the arts very heavily in Alberta. Yes, they get occasional jobs working in the arts, and they spend the rest of their time working at a myriad of other jobs, which helps them stay alive and pay their rent so that they can go out and continue to make art in whatever form that is.

I would really like to see this government step up to the plate, understand and acknowledge the contribution that artists have made in this province and what an economic driver in fact they are in this province. It's money that stays in this province, Mr. Speaker. It doesn't go away. It doesn't go to shareholders in a multinational corporation. That money stays right here in Alberta and circulates here. I would really like to see the government increase the Alberta Foundation for the Arts grant pot of money to \$40 million immediately. That fund has been starved for a very long time, and I'd like to see that corrected.

The sixth group of people in my constituency that had particular interest in what was in the throne speech were students because they were really looking for help. You've all heard my argument on the transfer of intergenerational debt, which I argue has happened instantly. You know, paying off that debt basically was shifted to the shoulders, in many cases, of students and seniors and people on programs like AISH.

Anything the government can do to improve access – and that's real access with real desks in real classrooms with real instructors. Yes, I hear what the government is saying about virtual space, but it's also about staffing, and it's about infrastructure in the postsecondary institutions. So I encourage them to continue on that path.

I'd also like to note that my constituents hold a keen interest in the environment and particularly in conservation, so I'm going to be holding the government to account on that.

We would like to see a complete workplace smoking ban. I think we're also very interested in seeing better labour laws, particularly around replacement worker legislation and first-contract legislation.

What's interesting is the government seems to keep planning for things to get worse, Mr. Speaker, and we in Edmonton-Centre believe that things are going to get better. We want to see things put in place that are going to make Alberta extraordinary, not just okay, not just good, not just great but extraordinary. We are on the lip, the cusp of something, great potential, so let's do it.

Thank you.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. members, Standing Order 29 allows for a five-minute question and comment period. Past practice has been that we try to restrict that to one minute for questions, comments, and responses. So the floor recognizes anyone that wishes to speak under Standing Order 29.

Seeing none, I recognize the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

**Ms Haley:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm truly grateful to be able to speak at this the first session of the 26th Legislature.

I would like to offer my condolences to the family of Her Honour Lois Hole. She was a truly remarkable and inspiring woman.

I would also like to offer my congratulations to our new Lieutenant Governor and wish him and his family all the very best as he

begins to serve our province in his new role. We have been truly blessed with the men and women chosen to be our Lieutenant Governors, and I know that His Honour Mr. Kwong will also exceed our expectations.

Congratulations to all members, both new and returning. This is a great year for our province and its citizens. I feel so privileged to be here again as an MLA in this our 100th anniversary as a province.

I would like to thank the residents of Airdrie-Chestermere for their support. In four elections now, Mr. Speaker, I have only lost four polls out of close to 300, all of them in my first election in 1993, all of them in your area. I am very gratified by the strength of my win, and I repeat the one promise that I have made in four elections. I promise I will continue to try to do my best to represent the needs of my constituents, not always the wants but the needs, and we have many.

We have a very high-growth constituency, with growth rates consistently over the years coming in at around 8 per cent for Airdrie and 18 per cent for Chestermere and Langdon. We opened new schools with a dozen portables attached and instantly high occupancy rates. I know both the Minister of Education and the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation are fully aware of our issues, and I am grateful to both of them for taking the time to meet with both of my school boards.

In addition to school facilities, we are in desperate need of overpass work, both at the north and south ends of Airdrie, as well as traffic control lights in Chestermere, an overpass on 797 to cross highway 1, and Langdon needs control of its main street, as well as the Prince of Peace Village, just east of the Calgary city limits, needing assistance with traffic control at the entrance and exit to its village off highway 1, issues that I have been raising and will continue to raise until we finally get our problems solved.

I'm also very pleased that Jack Davis, the CEO of the Calgary regional health authority, has taken a personal interest now in making sure that the medical needs of Airdrie are finally going to be taken seriously. It has been a long battle, but as they say, good things come to those who wait, and I know that we've waited. We've been very patient, but I'm afraid the patience is wearing pretty thin. Our new mayor in Airdrie, Linda Bruce, has also worked very hard on the medical clinic initiative, Mr. Speaker, and I would like to take the time to thank her for her effort and diligence on this.

4:20

I would also like to mention my municipal councils, Mr. Speaker, as I feel particularly lucky in the truly awesome people that I get to work with. In addition to superb councillors, I also get to work with mayors Bruce, Fuselli, Rowe, and Mikkelsen, with Reeve Schule, and with Mrs. Metzger of the Rocky View school board as well as school trustee Linda Wellman of the Calgary Catholic board. I know that the residents of our area can from time to time get frustrated with the growth pressures that we deal with. I also know that the men and women in my area that serve our constituents all work very hard and with integrity and honour to try and solve those problems, and I'm grateful to all of them for their efforts.

One hundred years ago in our province, Mr. Speaker, I could not have been elected an MLA. Even 50 years ago it would have been very difficult, but today we have 13 women here, not because they are women but because they are all strong Albertans with a dream and a vision for our province. Now, if you lined all 13 of us up and asked us what that vision was, you would have 13 totally different responses, but that is the beauty of politics: good people with different points of view get elected, come here, and try their best. I know that that is true for all 83 MLAs, but in this our centennial year

I would like to thank the women that came before us and made it possible for the 13 of us to be here.

I hope it is not inappropriate to say, Mr. Speaker, that I think Alberta is a better place because there are women involved in every aspect of people's lives from construction to research and from business owners to politicians. I admire Albertans for their willingness to see women in many roles. And truth be told, if all the women in Alberta decided to withdraw from the workforce in our province, our economy would collapse.

Mr. Speaker, I lived in Europe for a year in the late '80s, and one of the realizations I had when I was there was how young we are as a province and how we take for granted that we can compete with established and mature civilizations that have gone through their growth in the building of their infrastructure over hundreds if not thousands of years. I stood in a cathedral in Lausanne, Switzerland. At the time it was 1,293 years old and Alberta was celebrating its 82nd birthday. I stood and looked at this enormous building and realized that they had taken longer to build this one cathedral than we have to build an entire province. They did it without cranes. The bricks and arches were made by hand, put in place by people using pulleys and ropes and huge numbers of people working on one project. The family business was truly a family business. Generations of a family would work on one project.

Our world today is so unlike that. Our challenge is to try and keep up with the speed of change that the Industrial Revolution, the technology revolution, and now the knowledge-based revolution are sweeping over us. When I was first elected in 1993, MLAs were not even allocated computers. Apparently we didn't need them, and now, just over a decade later, every MLA has been given a laptop. We can and do use them right here in this Assembly, and I can't imagine trying to do my job without one anymore.

My sons could not imagine a world without colour TVs or cell phones, McDonald's Restaurants or paved highways. Yet when I was a child, TVs were black and white, if you were lucky enough to have one at all. Phones weighed about 10 pounds and may have had a crank on the side that you wound up to try and get an operator. [interjection] I'm not telling you how old I am. My first phone number when I was 10 years old was 212. It was up in Lesser Slave Lake, and it was on a party line. I grew up with gravel roads, and that was gravel if you were lucky. Most of the time it was just a trail backlit by a D9 Cat because we also lived in the oil patch, and that's just the way the world was. We had power when the rig was running because we could use the power plant, but when the rigs were shut down, we used coal-oil lamps.

My brother and I had the world's best imaginations because we had to. We had to invent things to play. I lived through books, and of course I grew up in the oil patch, so my life, I admit, was a bit different than many of my colleagues here. But it was what it was. I didn't question it. The junior high school I went to in Lesser Slave Lake was heated by coal. We considered ourselves lucky when the public health nurse would come to town. There was no doctor or hospital there, but I don't remember anybody complaining about it. We were all just happy that our dads had jobs. Life was maybe a little simpler then.

My dad had a love for golf, so he and several of his friends decided to build a golf course there. There were no provincial grants. There were just a group of guys out there month after month over the course of several years building a golf course. They finally got it open and hosted the oilmen's golf tournament. It was a huge day for my dad. He had been injured in an oil field accident years before. His leg was crushed, and they told him that he would be lucky to walk and that he would never golf again. Well, they were wrong. He did golf and as often as he could right up until he died.

I realize that I sound like I must be close to 100 years old. Well, I'm not quite there yet. The truth is that massive changes have occurred just in our lifetimes. In this our centennial year I truly hope that we pause to reflect on those changes and not just on our physical environment, Mr. Speaker, but also on our level of expectation as a society on what we want from government. How deep do we want government in people's lives?

I listened with great attention to the Speech from the Throne, and there were many wonderful initiatives in that speech. We need more spaces in postsecondary education, but noting the rapid expansion of high-speed Internet, I wonder if we know how many students will take their courses online 15 years from now when 10 years ago it was almost unheard of.

I worry a little bit, Mr. Speaker, about the sustainability of some of our programs. I don't question the value of the programs, just the sustainability of them. The Health Council of Canada estimates that with our aging demographics the health system will grow by at least 80 per cent over the next 10 years. I think they're way off. I think it is more than capable of growing by 80 per cent in the next five or six years. If I'm right, or even if they are, the provincial budget will be consumed by health care unless changes are made in how it is paid for and how it is delivered. Our expectations of what the system can and should do may have to be adjusted a bit as time goes on because it is just possible that it will not be capable of doing all things for all people all of the time.

We have incredible research going on right here in our province thanks in large part to a foundation set up 25 years ago, and, as announced, it will be enhanced. The researchers are amazing, and they think they may have found a way to help a group of people with a genetic disorder. From what I've heard, there is no doubt that this new discovery can and will help people. The downside right now is that the estimated cost is \$300,000 per patient per year. I would like the researchers to spend some time on how we can make our system sustainable and not just expensive, but that's just me.

Right now we have many bright and thoughtful people working hard on developing great programs that will solve the problems for many families, whether it be in Children's Services, Human Resources and Employment, health care, Education, Advanced Education, to name but a few. We have other bright and thoughtful people trying to figure out ways to pay for it all.

So in this our 100th year I ask all my legislative colleagues to look back a little bit before they look forward. Don't forget that independent and freethinking spirit that has brought us this far. Let us as MLAs help where necessary but respect Albertans' right to succeed and their right to fail.

I have travelled extensively, Mr. Speaker, across Canada, the United States, and to countries in Europe. There is no place I would rather be. I thank God that I was born an Albertan and that, as the words on our crest so eloquently put it, I was born strong and free.

Thank you.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Anyone wishing to rise on Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

If not, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

**Dr. Pannu:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and respond to the Speech from the Throne. Before I start with the response, I want to congratulate you on your election as Deputy Speaker and on your very first opportunity to preside over the proceedings of this House this afternoon.

I also want to not overlook congratulating the Lieutenant Governor, Hon. Norman Kwong, for his appointment into this position. My congratulations to him and his wife, and we look forward to his contribution to the Alberta we want to build in the future.



Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure to rise in this House. I see lots of familiar faces but also lots of new faces. I want to congratulate all the members of this House for their election or re-election. I look forward to working with each and every one of them in this session and beyond.

Mr. Speaker, we are entering the new century of this province. This is the centennial year, so Albertans are hoping that their government and their Legislature will come up with a vision of a new Alberta, the Alberta of the next century, the new Alberta, that will excite their imaginations, that will strengthen their sense of hope in their own future and the future of all of us as a provincial community and the hope that the Alberta of the 21st century will be charting a course in which democratic values will take a central place in developing our communities, developing our institutions, developing our educational institutions, political institutions, and all.

So looking at this throne speech, I search for the vision, the dream that at the turn of the new century for this province this government is presenting for Albertans to consider and to feel excited about.

4:30

Albertans are hard-working, optimistic, compassionate. They've demonstrated this over and over again. The very last expression of those core values and commitment of Albertans to those values was to be seen in the response that Albertans made to the victims of this huge international disaster, the tsunami disaster that hit two continents, nine or 10 different countries far away from us here. Albertans were generous beyond the expectations of anyone in responding to this huge natural disaster leading to human tragedy. So those values are alive and well in this province.

Albertans are expecting their leaders, their government, to renew their commitment to those values and incorporate them, inscribe those values in everything that we do, in every action that we take, in every policy that we develop, a vision of our future that we forge working together. Looking at this throne speech, I keep looking for the cues, for some signs that would assure me, assure my constituents, assure Albertans that, in fact, the government is quite alive and receptive to their hopes, their dreams, their values.

I find the throne speech lacking in its ability to inspire Albertans to higher goals, to building a more compassionate, a more humane future for all of us, where we are freed from the prison of poverty. In this very wealthy province with an economy that's growing at a rapid pace, expanding in many directions, driven by our natural resources wealth, we continue to find lots of fellow Albertans who live in conditions of poverty. More heartbreaking is to see our children, a substantial percentage of children in Alberta, 15 to 20 per cent, who live under conditions of poverty.

Poverty disables. Poverty is disabling. Poverty is prison-like, and I would have hoped that the throne speech would commit the Alberta of the 21st century in its own beginnings of the second century to eradicating poverty. Signs of that poverty are to be seen everywhere. Go to food banks. Look at the homeless on our streets in big urban cities and in smaller towns; they're everywhere. This speech doesn't ask the question and doesn't challenge Albertans by saying that there's no room for us to live with the realization that it's okay to have homeless among us. There's absolutely no reason why this province should find its own citizens, Albertans, living under conditions of homelessness. It takes away human dignity to be homeless. It hurts our sense of wellness and humanity to be thrown onto the streets.

I don't see any commitment, a pledge, an undertaking in the form of a vision that over the next five years this province, this government, is determined to provide leadership to Albertans to achieve a

social condition in which there will be absolutely no need for anyone to have to go to food banks. Yet we find that as the provincial economy has grown, it hasn't translated into prosperity for all. In fact, whether you are in Medicine Hat, a city that I visited last year on one of my tours of southern Alberta – and I was invited to go and visit the food bank, which is used by increasing numbers of people who live in that beautiful city.

Why is it that in the richest province in this great country, in Alberta, we have an expanding need for the food banks? More and more Albertans go to food banks in order to get the food their families need. We have created a whole new class of the working poor in this province. There's no attention paid here, firstly, to say that, yes, it's a problem, and secondly that we are up to addressing this problem, solving this problem, and then setting timelines that we are going to do it together, that we have the resolve and the commitment and the resources that we're going to put there so that this problem can be addressed.

Alberta in the new century must provide special opportunities to young children, preschool children. There is an opportunity now for us to make serious investments in our own future by investing in the care of our children, child care, child care that includes a robust vision of child development and early childhood education.

Our child care centres must become centres of learning and development and growth for every child in this province, yet there's no commitment that I see in this throne speech to embracing that challenge, to embracing that opportunity to make sure that children who are two, three years old today, the ones who are going to build this new century, who are going to build the new Alberta, will not be deprived of the very fundamental experiences that all children need at that age. It is those experiences that become the building blocks for their later success. If children miss out when they're one year old, two years old, three years old, on those very fundamental, important learning experiences, opportunities to develop and grow in certain ways, they cannot become successful, first, in school and later on, when they leave school, in the wide, open world outside. So we have in this speech an absence, a stunning silence of this government on what its plans are to address this very critical question that we have before us with respect to providing facilities for our preschool children.

4:40

If anything, this government is about to squander the opportunity that's provided by a commitment made by the federal government. After 13 years of waiting, at least the federal government now says: we are willing to put funds in there for the development of these early childhood development and education facilities in every province. Our province is dragging its heels. It's mired in its own concerns about keeping control. Control is more important than providing those facilities. Its concerns with for-profit/nonprofit mix trump the interests of children in this province.

I think it's a shame that we as a province are not playing a leading role in insisting on the establishment of national standards. We can be leaders in that. We need to provide that leadership. We have the capacity to provide that leadership to establish national standards, which every child care facility dedicated to providing development experiences, learning experiences, early childhood education experiences will have to meet. That should be the primary concern, not who runs these child care facilities. That's absent in this speech, and I'm disappointed. My constituents and Albertans, I'm sure, are disappointed that this government is silent on this very critical issue.

Mr. Speaker, I seek your guidance. How many more minutes do I have?

**The Deputy Speaker:** Sorry. Your time has elapsed.

Is there anyone who wishes to be recognized under 29(2)(a)? Are you rising on 29(2)(a), hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar?

**Mr. MacDonald:** Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a question for the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. I was listening with interest to his response to the Speech from the Throne, and I certainly would agree with him on his points, certainly on issues related to poverty and children, the fact that too many children in this province think Kraft dinner is a luxury meal.

The hon. member has in the past been a passionate defender of public health care, and I was curious. I didn't hear him talk at length about public health care and his view on where we're going in this province with public health care. I'm now asking him to share with this hon. member and the entire House his concerns about the direction we are going in this province with public health care.

Thank you.

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

**Dr. Pannu:** Thank you very much, hon. colleague. Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to address the question. I have, I guess, a minute to do it.

There's widespread concern across Alberta among Albertans with respect to the direction that this government proposes to take with respect to refashioning Alberta's health care system one more time yet. What I've been hearing from Albertans is that they want this government to give a commitment to them that their health care system will be publicly funded, publicly delivering services, and will not be taken away from them, that it will not be stolen by using a term like the third way. This third way is the Mazankowski report way. They have told me that it's the Graydon report way, and they are not going to be fooled by a new label that the government is now proposing to use. They don't want this government to be paying the consultants and advisers of the Fraser Institute, west and east, to again be put on a new expert committee to give us advice on what to do about the system. They have heard enough.

Albertans know enough about where to take their health care system. They want this government's commitment that it will not steal the system away from them. Mr. Speaker, at four different places in Alberta, from Medicine Hat to Grande Prairie to Calgary to Edmonton, we heard the same message from concerned Albertans about the future of health care. They are not at all willing to trust the designs of this government with respect to yet further changes that it proposes to make come May or June or whenever it starts to do it.

Thank you.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Back to the Speech from the Throne, the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Before I commence my maiden speech, I would like to express my sincere appreciation of the leadership the Speaker showed and the solemnity when he first shared the news last Thursday of the tragic deaths of the four young RCMP constables. Our hearts and gratitude go out to their families for the gift of their sons, husbands, and fathers.

I would also like to take a moment to express my condolences on behalf of the residents of Calgary-Varsity to the family and many friends who recently observed the untimely passing of our Lieutenant Governor, the Hon. Lois Hole. We welcome, however, a distinguished gentleman and proud Albertan, the Hon. Norman Kwong, to continue the great work that his highly revered predecessor began.

On a personal note, I was thrilled to be able to meet such a famous celebrity as the Hon. Mr. Kwong as he had a distinct role to play in one of my most precious childhood memories. The first football game my father ever took me to starred none other than the living legend himself, Normie Kwong. I congratulate the Hon. Mr. Kwong as he assumes the position of Lieutenant Governor of the 26th Alberta Legislature and to the Speaker for his continued service to the House and to you, the Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, a willingness to change and grow is a powerful motivator, as evidenced in the Calgary-Varsity constituency in the recent provincial election. It is my pleasure as the newly elected MLA for Calgary-Varsity to respond to the throne speech and provide this House with some insight into the many facets of the diverse, dynamic constituency I'm proud to call home.

I have the privilege of standing here today as a representative of Calgary-Varsity because of the dedicated support and efforts of hundreds of financial supporters and incredibly effective, skilled, caring, and highly motivated campaign workers. To each of you, thank you for the opportunity to represent you in this Legislative Assembly. Individuals from diverse backgrounds, including dedicated seniors, friends, teachers, and former students and parents, worked collaboratively because they believed in a new, inclusive version of what could be, given Alberta's bountiful resource and Albertans' potential. To my campaign supporters and all constituents of Calgary-Varsity I declare that I will strive to respectfully uphold the powerful democratic process by listening to and addressing constituents' concerns, holding the government accountable, and striving to bring about positive change which will benefit Calgary-Varsity constituents and all Calgary-Varsity Albertans.

This constituency is typical of many which 30 years ago were considered outlying suburbs, however, due to the rapid urban growth of the city of Calgary, find themselves now reclassified as inner city. Calgary-Varsity encompasses the vibrant communities of Dalhousie, Brentwood, Charleswood, Varsity, University Heights, portions of Silver Springs, Banff Trail, Capitol Hill, and Triwood. Calgary-Varsity hosts a healthy array of bustling schools, libraries, community halls, recreational facilities, thriving small businesses, and enviable parks and pathways. The people, however, are naturally this constituency's greatest asset. The residents of Calgary-Varsity represent a rich cross-section of society and stem from various walks of life and economic and cultural backgrounds.

4:50

I wish to take this opportunity to thank the hon. Murray Smith for his valued service to this remarkable constituency from 1993 to 2004 and wish him all the best in his new position in Washington.

I have had the privilege of living in the constituency, more specifically Dalhousie, for the past 25 years. My daughter has fond memories of growing up in the area, playing in the community soccer league, riding her bike down the pathways to the constituency's many parks and playgrounds, and attending the local public schools from elementary right up to the University of Calgary, where my wife and I are also alumni.

Schools are an essential cornerstone of any community. I have a particularly strong interest in the delivery of public education within the riding as my background for the past 34 years is teaching, 21 years of which took place within the constituency at Jerry Potts elementary and F.E. Osborne junior high. I retired from full-time teaching two years ago. However, I spent a great deal of time substitute teaching in various Calgary-Varsity schools at the elementary, junior, and senior high level. My wife taught in and around the area, and my daughter, also a teacher, began her career at a well-respected elementary school within the constituency. My

first-hand experience coupled with the extensive discussions with students, parents, teachers, and school staff during and following the election has made me intimately aware of the numerous concerns constituents are saddled with regarding the government's lack of support for education in this province.

The blatant inadequacy of government funding has hurt the schools in the Calgary-Varsity constituency and throughout this province. Alberta suffers from Canada's highest dropout rate, a pronounced lack of support for special needs and ESL students, overcrowded classrooms, outdated and often unsafe and environmentally unsound infrastructure, a shortage of classroom resources, a dismal supply of library books and staff, cuts to arts and language programs, and increasingly expensive school fees, which are becoming a heavy burden on parents like any other user fee or tax.

On behalf of the residents of Calgary-Varsity, I hope to impress upon the government that parents cannot continue to subsidize schools indefinitely. Small class sizes are not a luxury but are essential for quality teaching and learning. Curriculum support must outweigh spending on overemphasized areas such as controversial achievement testing, of very questionable value.

The cause of the majority of problems that ail the school system is that the government has chronically overlooked and under-researched the true cost of education. You get what you pay for. Government funding has no relation to schools' actual costs. It's not necessarily about spending more but spending smarter.

Calgary-Varsity, as denoted by the name, is a university community. The University of Calgary lies at the heart of the Calgary-Varsity constituency. I am proud to have obtained my degree at this well-respected institution back in 1971. The University of Calgary exemplifies the power of education to help people of varied ages to reach personal and professional goals. The students, support staff, and faculty of the University of Calgary are a valuable Alberta resource. They deserve our respect.

I have heard from postsecondary students, many of whom are forced to work two minimum wage jobs to pay for their inflated tuition, rent, and/or food and are looking forward to the funding specifics of how the Alberta government will improve the quality, affordability, and guarantee the sustainability and diversity of postsecondary education as an investment in both their and Alberta's future.

I have also spoken with many of the valuable people who support the students in a variety of roles, from faculty to food service to maintenance and security, who are watching nervously as their budgets, buildings, and jobs crumble around them. As my hon. colleague from Calgary-Currie likes to say, we must get postsecondary institutions off their starvation diet.

The contributions of leading-edge philanthropists to the University of Calgary, that have resulted in the creation of the recently established Institute for Quantum Information Science and the Markin health institute should serve as the icing on a well-government-funded cake rather than as the dough that holds the cake together.

The success and prosperity of our province in the next century depends upon a highly skilled and educated, richly talented and diverse workforce. The University of Calgary, in addition to other academic and trade-based institutions throughout Alberta, can only achieve this through stable, predictable, long-term financial support from our provincial government. My opposition colleagues and I will diligently promote adequate public and postsecondary funding in order that education be accessible to all and so no student in Alberta is denied the opportunity to excel.

In the run-up to the fall election seniors, especially those on fixed incomes, who represent a large portion of the Calgary-Varsity

constituency population, received a welcomed, long-overdue relief when the province no longer collected their health care premium taxes. Hopefully, during this session of the Legislature the government will also come through with a promised return of their vision, dental, and pharmaceutical benefits now that the province is supposedly debt free, which is due in a large part to the contributions seniors made throughout their lives.

Another announcement that seniors in long-term care facilities would look forward to is an improvement in the services they receive which is directly proportional to the crippling rent increases that the government forced them and their families to endure. For those fortunate enough to still be able to drive, a decrease in their insurance rates would be appreciated given the province's underwriting of private insurance profits by reducing yet-to-be-defined soft tissue injury settlements, capped at \$4,000.

Seniors deserve the best possible quality of life and must be given the means to live with dignity, a notion that stands in stark contrast to the cuts the government has imposed in previous budgets. Seniors, their family members, and support group advocates are anxiously awaiting the Auditor General's review and recommendations for long-term care, which we hope the government will quickly accept and implement once they are discussed and debated in this spring sitting of the Legislature.

In addition to seniors, I have heard from a large number of AISH recipients of varied ages in the Calgary-Varsity constituency who are hoping to be recognized and valued by the province through not only an increase in their minuscule living allowance but through a decrease in the portion of the province's clawback. I recently met with representatives of the VRRRI, the Vocational and Rehabilitation Research Institute, located within the Calgary-Varsity boundaries, to discuss the AISH advocates' coalition recommendations report, which has been compiled with government representation and input. With the anticipated approval of this House I hope it will be quickly funded and implemented.

One of the ways in which the Calgary-Varsity constituency is dramatically different from the majority of other Calgary or Alberta constituencies is the fact that it not only has a soon-to-be-completed hospital, the new Children's hospital, within its boundaries, but it is in close proximity to the Foothills hospital, which, although possessing wings older than the imploded General, escaped the latter's fate. While the Children's hospital will not house all the children's services under one roof, as it was originally proposed to do, and although it will only provide a few more beds than the existing Children's, their layout and accompanying child-and family-friendly support rooms will serve as a much-needed addition to the million-plus combined population of the communities served by the Calgary health region.

With luck and a renewed government commitment to public health care delivery the second replacement hospital in southeast Calgary, which has been set back to 2010, will finally be in service and, hopefully, paid for rather than P3 leased, together with the much-needed additions to the Foothills, Rockyview, and Lougheed hospitals, which must be completed as quickly as possible to relieve the pressure of growing waiting lists. In royalty-rich Alberta good health care should not be merely a perk.

Calgary-Varsity is a remarkable, concerned, caring community where people have settled to live, learn, work, and play. This vibrant constituency contributes not only to the quality and character of the city of Calgary but to the province of Alberta as a whole. Calgary-Varsity voters supported me on November 22 because they want a strong and effective opposition voice in the Legislature. Calgary-Varsity residents want their concerns and values reflected in the questions, statements, and motions I bring forward on their

behalf. They have asked me to stand up for what they believe in: affordable and accessible health care; quality education for all; inclusive and equitable community support systems; bold innovation and strong, steady management; fiscal responsibility; and open, accountable government.

It is my privilege to stand here today as the representative for Calgary-Varsity on the cusp of Alberta's new century exhilarated by the opportunity to help shape a just and inclusive vision of this province.

Thank you.

5:00

**The Deputy Speaker:** Anyone wishing to rise on 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, I recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

**Dr. Brown:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a singular honour to rise in the Assembly this afternoon. Let me begin by expressing my gratitude to the residents of Calgary-Nose Hill who've entrusted me with the privilege of public service and granted me the opportunity to be their voice in this House. I want to say to all of the residents of Calgary-Nose Hill that I will do my utmost to listen to all of you and to be your voice in government.

Over the past 12 years this government has achieved remarkable things. To the hon. Premier and to my colleagues who are returning to this House I say this: it was your leadership and your record that led us to another resounding victory in this recent election, and for this you have all our gratitudes. Mr. Speaker, I would say to the House that our work is not finished. Indeed, it never will be finished for as legislators it is our opportunity and our job to improve the conditions which we have found, as those who have preceded us in this Chamber have also done.

Mr. Speaker, this year marks the centenary of Alberta's incorporation as a province in Canada. This is a time to pay tribute to those who have with courage, vision, and hard work built this province from our aboriginal peoples to our pioneers and our builders and who have left us proud legacies. I'm proud to say that my own ancestors have played a part in writing this great story. My maternal ancestors William and Helen Shaw and their children came to what is now Calgary in 1883. They journeyed by covered wagon from near present-day Swift Current, Saskatchewan, across a wild and desolate land to take out a homestead on the banks of Fish Creek. There they built Alberta's first manufacturing industry, the Shaw Woolen Mills of Midnapore.

A number of my family have also served the military forces of our country. My paternal grandfather, John Thomas Brown, volunteered to serve his country in World War I. He went overseas with the Canadian Expeditionary Force, where he was gravely wounded in the Battle of the Somme. My parents, Allan and Irene Brown, both volunteered for military service in the Second World War. Mr. Speaker, it is our task to build on the courage and the vision of our ancestors. The challenges that we face are myriad, but none are insurmountable. We can improve education and training for our young people, we can preserve and improve the quality of our public health care, we can dedicate ourselves to the needs of our senior citizens and those less fortunate, and we can sustain and protect the environment and our wildlife resources.

Let me turn to education. Our education system from kindergarten through high school is among the finest in the world. Yet, sadly, many of our young people drop out as early as the age of 16 years to take unskilled jobs to their own long-term detriment and to the detriment of our society at large. Let us set a goal to reduce the high school dropout rate by one-half. Let us achieve this goal by making school attendance mandatory until the age of 17 years, by ensuring

that programs are developed and supported for those young people who are at risk of failing, and by providing enhanced learning and career choices appropriate to individual aptitudes.

We must also ensure that Alberta continues to train and keep the best teachers, who make all the difference in determining the success of our young people. I know that teachers like Roberta Scott and Mabel Dow of Midnapore school made a great difference to me.

Mr. Speaker, let me now address some of the issues of higher education and training. This government has provided us with a strategic plan which includes the goals of leading and learning, unleashing innovation, competing in a global marketplace, and making Alberta the best place to live, work, and visit. As our province makes its transition to a knowledge-based economy, the key to all of these goals is to invest in education. Let us heed the wisdom of the philosopher Diogenes, who said: the foundation of every state is the education of its youth. Why not aspire as a province to reach the pinnacle of accomplishment in teaching, learning, discovery, and creativity in the sciences and in the arts? Why not have our universities and other postsecondary institutions be among the best in the world? If we do so, the future success of our province will be assured.

Mr. Speaker, the Speech from the Throne provides a positive plan to provide increased access and more affordability for postsecondary education. It is our obligation to ensure that the riches accruing to our generation from nonrenewable resources are of benefit not only to our generation but that they also benefit future generations. Let us build on the access to the future endowment and continue to invest a portion of surplus funds into that fund. Let us build on the quality of our major research institutions by enabling them to grow and attract the best researchers and provide the best facilities by putting in place a long-term capital funding plan necessary to fulfill the government's goals for increased access.

In pursuing our goals of educational excellence, we should not focus narrowly on fields of endeavour which may be perceived to have immediate economic benefits, for such an approach lacks foresight. Often the fruits of knowledge are little known at the outset but at some future date may produce great benefits.

Dr. John Polanyi, the Canadian Nobel laureate, put it this way. We should not try to turn centres of excellence into centres of relevance because such a policy will fail to deliver value for money for two reasons: first, because excellence is rare, and we simply cannot select the excellence we prefer; and, secondly, because the discovery that one wishes to see made and its application lie well in the future, and the future is hard to predict.

Let us recognize that pure sciences, the arts, and the humanities also have important places in our postsecondary education system and that they make important contributions to the richness of learning.

Let me turn now to health care. Our health care practitioners are of the highest standards, as are our programs and facilities. While public expectations of what health care can and should do are increasing, so are the costs of providing those services. Changes are both necessary and inevitable, and we should innovate and modify the methods of delivering health care so as to optimize the health and wellness of all Albertans. Nonetheless, we must ensure that whatever changes are made, universal public health care continues to be just that: publicly funded, universally accessible, affordable to all Albertans, and of the highest standard. We must continue to ensure that timely access to quality health care is never dependent upon financial means.

Mr. Speaker, there is no better way to acknowledge the contributions of those who have built this province than to accord recognition to our seniors. They, too, should benefit from the Alberta

advantage. Some priorities in this area include the necessity of ensuring that there is adequate and affordable housing for seniors and that our health care and support systems allow seniors to be as independent as possible. Where necessary, we must provide support to those who choose to remain living in their own homes and especially to those who selflessly provide such great service to our society by providing home care for spouses and other family members who are unable to care for themselves.

Mr. Speaker, the application of market value property assessment across the province and the upward trend in house prices have resulted in an increasing tax burden falling on those who live in long-established neighbourhoods in our cities. We must ensure that seniors who are faced with rising property taxes are not forced into hardship by such increases.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to speak briefly about Alberta's environment. There is no higher duty to which we are bound nor no greater legacy that we can bequeath to future generations than that of ensuring that our natural environment is preserved and enhanced. Alberta has always been a leader in those endeavours. We were the first province in Canada to create a ministry of the environment.

5:10

I wish to mention three priorities for the future. First, we must ensure that there is continued protection of public lands for the benefit and enjoyment of future generations. We must keep our inventory of public lands intact. Resource exploitation from those public lands must be done in a way that never compromises the ecological integrity of those lands.

Secondly, we should ensure that our water resources are conserved. We must have a comprehensive, integrated policy for watershed management, and this policy should be multidisciplinary and multidepartmental. It must build on the ideals of the water for life program. It must include policy in the fields of agriculture, forestry, industry, and hydrology and must establish guidelines for the development and land use in the eastern slopes and the riparian areas of our major watersheds, from which we draw our drinking and irrigation water.

Thirdly, Mr. Speaker, we need to ensure that our wildlife resources are conserved and protected for the enjoyment of all Albertans now and in the future. We need to allocate the resources required to protect and preserve our wildlife resources and to enforce our laws, and we must find ways to deal with the findings of our courts on special hunting privileges for aboriginal and Métis people for if we do not, wildlife and game conservation will be in jeopardy for all of our peoples.

Mr. Speaker, as parliamentarians many challenges lie before us as we play our part in writing the next chapter in the history of this province. We are entrusted with power not to advance our personal agendas nor to embellish our own names but for the noble purpose of serving people. Times of prosperity, like times of scarcity, provide great challenges to peoples and to governments. We must accept these challenges. We must seize the moment and ensure that these great opportunities which lie before us are not lost.

The motto of our fair province, *Fortis et Liber*, strong and free, is drawn from the anthem of our great nation of Canada. From Wood Buffalo to Waterton, from Zama City to Etzikom, from the Rocky Mountains to the prairie grasslands under endless skies of blue may Alberta always remain part of the "True North strong and free" and a place where freedom and individuality may flourish.

Mr. Speaker, may all of us in this House be granted the strength to fulfill our purpose here, which is to benefit the people of this fair province and this great nation now and in the future.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Are there any questions or comments under Standing Order 29?

Seeing none, we'll move to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

**Dr. B. Miller:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the time remaining, I rise with a great feeling of honour and privilege as the member of the Legislature for Edmonton-Glenora. After a high-profile campaign between very able candidates 55 per cent of Edmonton-Glenora voters went to the polls, and I feel quite elated to be elected by them. I know this is not the time for introductions, but I would like to acknowledge that the most important supporter of my campaign is here in the gallery, my wife, Rhea Jansen. She is an outstanding watercolour painter, and she put aside her paints for the campaign. She became just a tireless worker, going door to door on my behalf, so thank you.

Edmonton-Glenora residents are highly educated and very well informed about politics and public issues, and they have high expectations for their MLAs. Their confidence in me is I believe an endorsement of the social justice agenda which I have been advocating for many years: equal justice for the poor and the marginalized and greater participation in the wealth of Alberta by all Albertans. Edmonton-Glenora voters expect their MLA to be a strong voice in the Legislature for the values which they believe in.

What is it that the residents of Edmonton-Glenora want? This became quite clear to me recently in a town meeting in Inglewood, where I live. The town meeting, which had standing room only, was held to discuss the new proposal to develop the Camsell hospital site. All agreed that something must be done to develop that site – the hospital building has been sitting there empty for eight years – but there were many different opinions on the new proposal. As I listened to the people state their opinions – and some statements were quite emotional – it was obvious to me that the residents of Inglewood really care about their community and that they are all united in their desire to improve the quality of life of their community.

They're not against development, but they're asking important questions. Will 2,000 more people only exacerbate the already very busy traffic through the community? Will a huge urban development create a more secure, safe, and healthy neighbourhood? What will happen to the Inglewood School? Will there be some open space for parks? How will this development affect the value of their properties and homes? Speaker after speaker shared why they had moved to Inglewood, a quiet single-family neighbourhood with fine shopping at Westmount Shopping Centre. They expressed their concern, above all, for the quality of life of their community, and more and more quality of life is becoming the key measurement of growth and the criterion for evaluating change.

Quality of life is more than just income and the value of our property, but that is a good place to start. Edmonton-Glenora has a wide spectrum of income levels: 12.9 per cent of the population earns over \$100,000 a year, but 13.1 per cent earns less than \$20,000. So the gap between the rich and the poor is increasing, especially in cities like Edmonton. What is there in the throne speech which addresses this reality? There is one statement which I affirm with all my heart: "Albertans are caring, compassionate people who want every member of this province to have the opportunity to share in the Alberta advantage both today and in the next Alberta." Yes, Albertans are caring and compassionate; would that were true of governments.

Raising the minimum wage to \$7 and promising yet to determine increases to AISH and reintroducing optical and dental benefits for seniors does not address the real problem, which is a paternalistic,

punitive, uncaring, welfare system. Arbitrary handouts every 10 years solve nothing. We need a total reform of the system, the restoration of social workers on the front lines who will deal in a caring way with the real needs of people, and an invitation to people living in poverty to participate in building a system in which people will have a living wage so that they can lift their heads with dignity and pride.

People often ask me if entering the public realm of politics is a radical break from my career as a minister in the United Church of Canada. Well, one of the differences is that at least in the congregation that I served, when I got up to speak, the congregation didn't all disappear; they stayed. But there's lots of continuity, not just differences. It's a radical change, but the continuity is that I'm still able to deal with the same social justice issues. After 27 years of serving as a pastor and preacher for churches in Lethbridge and St. Paul and for the last 15 years at Robertson-Wesley United Church in Edmonton, I can now come here to address the same social justice agenda.

It's not unusual for preachers to enter politics. In the last 100 years there have been 21 preachers in this House: 19 ordained ministers, including well-known former Speaker Dr. David Carter, and two unordained preachers who are perhaps the most famous preachers, two former Premiers, William Aberhart and Ernest C. Manning. But the tradition that has shaped me as a preacher is not that which shaped Ernest C. Manning and William Aberhart. It's called the Social Gospel tradition, which was prominent on the prairies in the first few decades of the 20th century and which produced such remarkable politicians here in Alberta as William Irvine and Nellie McClung. In fact, Nellie McClung taught Sunday school at Wesley Methodist Church right here in Edmonton, which later became Robertson Wesley United Church, which I served, and she served in this Legislature for five years.

So as I begin my work as a legislator, I am particularly aware of this rich heritage. Some preachers focus all their attention on heaven and life after death; you just have to turn on the TV to see that. Not the Social Gospel preachers. For them God was active in history and in politics. For them personal sin was secondary to the sin of social structures which left people poor and marginalized. Preachers of the Social Gospel demanded justice, not charity. They hated the soup kitchen philanthropy which enabled the rich to provide condescending handouts to the poor without questioning the injustices of the system. As the noted Saskatoon theologian Ben Smiley put it, quote: they were confident that the realm of God would come in the political events of daily life and that God's new Jerusalem would be built on Earth.

5:20

Now, in our time some have referred to the right-wing revival which has been going on for some years and, hopefully, is now waning. It's easy in the midst of a right-wing revival to forget the Social Gospel tradition and all of the values that it represented, values such as equal rights, which led to the inclusion of women in political life. Nellie McClung was a great leader to bring about the inclusion of women and the establishment of a social welfare system which served the needs of the poor, which is being gradually dismantled by the social policies of governments today.

The Social Gospel Movement produced a song which I'm going to the end with, a song that goes to the tune of the *Battle Hymn of the Republic*, which I'm not going to sing, but I'll repeat the words because the words focus on the real concern for me, which continues to be equal justice: equal justice for women, equal justice for gays and lesbians. Here are the words. The song goes like this.

The farmers of the prairie lands are massing in their might,  
Exalting in a principle, a cause for which they fight,  
The sacred cause of justice, the establishment of right,  
And equal rights for all.  
Oh, 'tis time to get together,  
You will help us get together,  
Pledge we all to stand together,  
For the day of peace and right.

Mr. Speaker, that is my pledge: to fight for the sacred causes of justice, equal rights, and peace as I represent the people of Edmonton-Glenora. And all the congregation said amen.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Is there anyone wishing to rise on Standing Order 29(2)(a)? I was going to say to the hon. member that had you chosen to sing the song, it wouldn't be the first time it was done in this Assembly.

Does anyone wish to rise on the Speech from the Throne?  
The hon. minister of seniors.

**Mrs. Fritz:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to adjourn debate on this matter.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

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

**Mr. Stevens:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that the Assembly stand adjourned until 8 o'clock this evening.

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