

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, March 8, 2005**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 05/03/08

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: Please be seated.

head:

Government Motions

Adjournment of the Legislature for RCMP Memorial Service

12. Mr. Stevens moved on behalf of Mr. Cenaiko:

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 RCMP, Royal Canadian Mounted Police, officers in Mayerthorpe.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, this is a nondebatable motion.

[Government Motion 12 carried]

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, may we briefly revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head:

Introduction of Guests

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

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to introduce to you and through you tonight some dear friends who are here. All of these individuals worked on my campaign for election and continue to support me in my role as an MLA. It's an honour to have these friends here tonight: Mr. David Watts, Mr. Neil Evans, Ms Judy Axelson, Ms Delia McCrae, Mary-Michael Kennedy, and Sue Stephens. I ask you to rise and receive the warm and traditional welcome of the Assembly.

head:

Government Motions

(continued)

Select Special Conflicts of Interest Act Review Committee

11. Mr. Stevens moved:

Be it resolved that

- (1) A Select Special Conflicts of Interest Act Review Committee of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta be appointed to review the Conflicts of Interest Act as provided in section 48 of that act consisting of the following members, namely Dr. Brown, chair; Mr. Shariff, deputy chair; Ms DeLong; Mr. Groeneveld; Mr. Lukaszuk; Mr. Martin; Dr. Miller; Dr. Morton; Mr. Oberle; Ms Pastoor; and Mr. Rogers.
- (2) The chair and members of the committee shall be paid in accordance with the schedule of category A committees provided in the most recent Members' Services Committee allowances order.
- (3) Reasonable disbursements by the committee for advertising, staff assistance, equipment and supplies, rent, travel,

and other expenditures necessary for the effective conduct of its responsibilities shall be paid subject to the approval of the chair.

- (4) In carrying out its duties, the committee may travel throughout Alberta and undertake a process of consultation with all interested Albertans.
- (5) In carrying out its responsibilities, the committee may with the concurrence of the head of the department utilize the services of the public service employed in that department or the staff employed by the Assembly or the office of the Ethics Commissioner.
- (6) The committee may without leave of the Assembly sit during a period when the Assembly is adjourned.
- (7) The committee must submit its report, including any proposed amendments to the act, within one year after commencing its review.
- (8) When its work has been completed, the committee must report to the Assembly if it is sitting. During a period when the Assembly is adjourned, the committee may release its report by depositing a copy with the Clerk and forwarding a copy to each member of the Assembly.

Mr. Stevens: This is a relatively routine matter, Mr. Speaker. The act in question provides that this legislation be reviewed every five years in this fashion.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise this evening and talk briefly about Government Motion 11. Certainly I for one and members on this side of the House do not consider this motion a routine matter. We need stronger conflict of interest guidelines and rules in this province. That is quite evident to everyone on this side of the House and to the majority of Albertans and hopefully to the government.

This committee is going to be dominated by government members. From this side of the House I'm pleased to see that the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East is going to serve on that committee as well as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora as well as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, who oddly enough – I was reviewing the history of the Assembly – is the first New Democrat member from the city of Edmonton to be elected to this Assembly. He has had a distinguished career as a parliamentarian, and I believe that these three members along with the government members will make a positive contribution to ensuring that not only are the conflict of interest laws in this province strengthened, but certainly they will be rigorously enforced as well.

I will look forward at the appropriate time to reading this report, and certainly I hope it's not like the Coverage of the Members of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta from the Alberta Risk Management Fund review, which was prepared for the government in December of 2001 but unfortunately was not made public by a tabling until last Thursday. So I'm sure the hon. member across the way is going to ensure that there are no lengthy delays in the final report becoming public.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just very, very similar to the argument yesterday with regard to question period, I believe there's strength in diversity, and having a greater representational role from other opposition parties I think can only serve to increase the

transparency and accountability of this particular committee. I would encourage the committee to extend its membership to include a member of the New Democratic Party, and I would like to see the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner be involved in at least two committees to get a sense of where the future of this province is headed.

Thank you.

8:10

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak in support of this motion to strike this all-party committee to do an important job for this House and for citizens of this province. I served on one other committee which was made up of all parties representing the House several years ago and that was struck on the initiative of the then Minister of Justice and Attorney General, Mr. Havelock. That committee's work and proceedings as it travelled around the province was most warmly received by Albertans. Albertans appreciate all-party committees holding public hearings inviting public input on public forums, and many of my colleagues who are now on the front benches on that side were also on that committee. So I strongly support the striking of this committee and wish well for the work of this committee over the next year.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Anybody else? The hon. Minister for Justice and Attorney General to close debate.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just simply wish to thank the hon. members for Edmonton-Strathcona and Edmonton-Gold Bar for the very strong support of this motion.

[Government Motion 11 carried]

Report on Risk Management Fund Coverage of MLAs

10. Mr. Stevens moved on behalf of Mr. Hancock:
Be it resolved that the report entitled Coverage of Members of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, Risk Management Fund, Cambridge Strategies Inc., 2001, tabled in the Assembly on Thursday, March 3, 2005, be referred to the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services.

Mr. Stevens: The nature of this report, Mr. Speaker, is that it deals with coverage afforded to members of this Assembly under the risk management fund. That particular fund has its derivation as a result of a request from this Assembly that came out of the all-members Special Standing Committee on Members' Services some time ago.

There are a number of recommendations, and it makes sense from my perspective, Mr. Speaker, that this report be referred to that committee for review and consideration and perhaps for some decision on behalf of the members. Of course, the members have this matter in their hands. Should they wish not to have it dealt with but simply have the matter tabled and leave it there, that is up to them, but it seems to me that it is a matter of concern to all members. We're asking that it be sent to an all-members committee, and therefore all members from the recognized parties in this Assembly will be able to comment and debate this particular report with *Hansard* capability.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased

on behalf of the Official Opposition to join in the debate this evening on Government Motion 10. As I said earlier, I was astonished to see how much time had passed between the time this report was finished and the time it was released to the public.

The authors of the report from Cambridge Strategies Inc. talk at length about freedom of speech and freedom of expression and the role of an MLA. Sometimes the role of an MLA can be difficult, and they are required to make public comment on sensitive issues. Certainly, I think the authors of this report have made some good suggestions. There is certainly no doubt about that.

When one walks through this Assembly these days, Mr. Speaker, it's early spring, there are beautiful flowers in the rotunda – the staff has done a marvellous job with the circular arrangement there – and one realizes just how lucky one is to be able to participate in parliamentary debates in this place. You travel another five feet from that circle, and you see the photographs of the gentlemen who unfortunately lost their lives last week in defending this community, this province, and this country. Hopefully, the smell of a funeral parlour will disappear, but we will be reminded always by those flowers in the Assembly of those who are willing to make the ultimate sacrifice to protect us. But at the same time we must ensure that we ourselves do not through the course of our duties libel others.

The risk management fund is always a difficult issue. There certainly are recent difficulties with the administration of this fund. I spoke earlier about the interval of three years and three months from the time this report was prepared until it was tabled here in the Assembly last Thursday. During that interval of over three years, Mr. Speaker, the Official Opposition and a national daily newspaper tried to pry from the reluctant hands of this government all the information regarding the use of the risk management fund in the matter between the former Treasurer of the province, Mr. Stockwell Day, and a gentleman in Red Deer.

Now, certainly, the risk management fund coverage extended to Mr. Day at that time was well in excess of \$700,000. I think this report cost in excess of \$70,000. I could stand corrected, Mr. Speaker. I can only imagine the internal costs to this government and eventually to the taxpayer that were accumulated or incurred to prevent both myself and the national newspaper, in this case the *Globe and Mail*, from receiving the information regarding the use of this Alberta risk management fund.

I had a good look at this report, and it talks about other cases with other members, but it fails to mention why there was a refusal by the Alberta risk management fund to cover the legal costs of the former Member for Edmonton-Glenora, Mr. Howard Sapers. Why he was denied coverage is not addressed in this report, and that is really important because we can't have selective coverage. It has to be for everyone, regardless of which political party they're involved in. It just can't be for some. And the rules on this coverage have to be made available when people want to know. People have a right. It's public information.

8:20

Now, I have one other observation in regard to this report at this time. It will be interesting to see just exactly what this select special committee does with this, whether they table it or whether they use this as some form of final guideline. If this report were to become part of the risk management fund administration, who would compile this list of lawyers that one could receive advice from? I'm going to quote, Mr. Speaker. This is on page 10.

Just as MLAs are able to approach the Ethics Commissioner should they have a question about an intended course of conduct, so should they be able to access a select pool of lawyers, at public expense, should they have a question about something they intend to say or otherwise publish.

Now, I would be interested in hearing how other members of this Assembly feel about this. A select pool of lawyers? Who would compile this list, and how does one become eligible to be on this list? Certainly, I hope that we wouldn't be creating a political football here. I don't think that is the intention of the authors of this report, but that is my major concern. Are we going to make this process political by having a poor selection process for these lawyers?

With that, Mr. Speaker, that concludes my comments in regard to this report. Certainly, it is interesting to see that there was this long delay while we fought valiantly, and lost, to try to unveil the secrecy that surrounds the risk management fund, but hopefully something will come of this. It's springtime, and I, too, am optimistic.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, before I recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, may we briefly revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

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

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure to introduce someone who I came to know very well during the election campaign as one of my most valued and trustworthy volunteers. This gentleman continues to serve me in the role as a co-manager in my constituency office. He's in the public gallery. I'd ask Daniel Langdon to please stand and have him receive the warm welcome of the House.

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

Mrs. Mather: Thank you. It's my pleasure to welcome a dear friend who worked very hard on my campaign and continues to support me and is here tonight, Mr. Abdi Karim Bakal. Please stand, Abdi, so that we can give you the warm and traditional welcome of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Any other guests for introduction?
The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona on the debate.

head: **Government Motions**
(*continued*)

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak in support of Motion 10, I believe it is. The motion, of course, is about referring this report by Cambridge Strategies Inc. This report is dated December 2001. It was over three years ago that this report was received by the government, and it deals with the coverage of the Members of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta from the Alberta risk management fund.

It's the delay in this report's arrival on the floor of this August Chamber that has been a matter of concern for many of us, including myself. After having waited and made inquiries behind the scenes for several years in various ways, I finally put a private member's motion for return on the Order Paper last week, seeking the release of this report.

I am pleased that the Minister of Justice and Attorney General took action on his own in the opening days of this Legislature last week to table this report. I want to thank him for his quick action on

this although I do want to express regret about the three-year delay in the process of this report reaching all members of the Assembly. Seventy thousand plus dollars of taxpayers' money was paid to get the report ready, and I think Albertans and members of this Legislature had the right and due expectation to receive a copy of it as soon as the report was submitted by this consulting company.

There's a second point I want to make. The report was not made based on public hearings, public hearings that were held by an all-party committee going around the province, nor was it a report prepared by a commission appointed by the Legislature or by this government. It's a private consulting company's report, and that should be kept in mind.

Having said that, I think the recommendations contained in this report do merit consideration. They don't necessarily answer all the questions to the satisfaction, perhaps, of all of us. Nevertheless, they do go some way, it appears, in addressing some of the key concerns that many of us had expressed on the floor of the House, outside to the media, and in our interviews with the authors of this report. I as the then leader of the New Democrat opposition was interviewed at length by the authors of this report, so I speak from personal knowledge of the concerns that I conveyed on behalf of our caucus to this committee. I'm sure the same was the case with the Liberal opposition. Its leader, I think, was interviewed, and many others might have been interviewed. I'm not sure who the others were who were interviewed.

But based on my conversation with the authors of the report, I notice that the recommendations reflect some of the steps that we were proposing and thought needed to be taken in order to make changes in the existing arrangements, existing arrangements which, our experience has shown, were very seriously flawed.

My colleague the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has drawn attention to two cases. In one case coverage was denied and no reasons were given, and we had no recourse as elected members to appeal that decision. The decision was final, made outside of this Legislature, beyond any influence or access that we could exercise over that decision. That was regrettable, the case of Howard Sapers, who at that time represented Edmonton-Glenora. Then, of course, the case of the former Treasurer, Mr. Day, brought into focus even more serious flaws with the current arrangement. So it was those two events, I think, that triggered the commissioning of this report done by consultants.

Now, with respect to the referral of this report now to the Members' Services Committee, I want to make a few comments on that. I think this committee report should be seen as a report prepared by a consulting group. It should be received as information, and the Members' Services Committee should obviously debate the recommendations and see if there are gaps that need to be filled, if there are recommendations that need to be amended and modified in order to strengthen them and make them more appropriate for the purposes that we want it to serve.

Thirdly, I think there's a great deal of merit for an issue like this to be debated more broadly, publicly, and one way of taking it out for dialogue and debate with Albertans would be perhaps for the Members' Services Committee to hold some public hearings or at least invite public input, and I want to underline this.

8:30

I think there's a great deal of concern on the part of Albertans that resulted from the failure of the current risk-management arrangement, that casts doubt on our own integrity as members of this House. I think that that doubt needs to be dispelled for good. In order for that to happen, I think that public input, to be invited by the Members' Services Committee, would be a very effective way of

approaching that problem. We need the trust in us restored on this issue by all Albertans, and that will happen if you go out to them, seek their advice, and seek public input. So that's my request and advice to the Members' Services Committee.

Finally, once the Members' Services Committee has had the benefit of deliberations within its own ranks, members, and then, hopefully, beyond it go out to get the advice of Albertans, then the recommendations of the Members' Services Committee should come back to the Legislature for approval because this is a very important matter on which all of us need to have the opportunity to have a final say.

That said, Mr. Speaker, I am speaking in support of this motion. I hope that the Members' Services Committee will do this important task in a way that will be satisfactory not only to us as individual members who are directly affected by whatever decision is made, but also it will serve to satisfy Albertans who have had serious concerns about the way this current arrangement has operated in the past. They want us to do a better job now.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Does anybody else wish to participate in the debate?

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader to close debate.

Mr. Stevens: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Once again I just simply wish to thank the members for Edmonton-Strathcona and Edmonton-Gold Bar for supporting the motion. I also wish to thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona for the kind words with respect to the voluntary release of the report, but I think he should on behalf of his party take full credit, given the opportunities are few in this House, because after all Motion for a Return I asked for it. It was probably under the pressure of that motion that I was persuaded to do what I did.

[Government Motion 10 carried]

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.

[Adjourned debate March 7: Mr. Liepert]

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

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise in this Assembly this evening with much humility and an overwhelming sense of responsibility as the newly elected Member of the Legislative Assembly for Edmonton-Rutherford. The tradition, as you know, is to share a little bit about myself, the constituency of Edmonton-Rutherford, and some of the cares and concerns expressed to me during the most recent provincial election.

Before doing so, however, I would like to thank His Honour the Lieutenant Governor, the Hon. Norman Kwong, for his delivery of the Speech from the Throne last Wednesday and congratulate him on his appointment as Alberta's Lieutenant Governor in this our centennial year. I would also like to applaud our Prime Minister, the

Rt. Hon. Paul Martin, for showing the wisdom and leadership he did when selecting His Honour after the passing of the beloved Lois Hole.

Congratulations are also in order for our colleagues from Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock and Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills for having been selected to perform the roles of Speaker and Deputy Speaker respectively and, of course, to you, Mr. Speaker, for your selection last week as the Deputy Chair of Committees. I have complete trust that all of you fine gentlemen will hold true to the commitments that you made when appearing in front of the Official Opposition caucus prior to having been elected to these positions. Quite clearly, we should also be congratulating all 83 members of this Assembly on their election wins on November 22, 2004.

It is especially gratifying for me as a rookie MLA to have 15 Liberal colleagues in the House with me, something that many in the media and probably many in this House didn't think would be possible. I'm indeed pleased for the people of Edmonton-Rutherford to see a much larger combined opposition in this Assembly, and I truly believe that all Albertans will be better served by having such a talented and diverse group of individuals to hold this government accountable.

I'd also like to extend a special welcome to the newly elected Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, Mr. Speaker. I know he's already received a bit of a rough ride from some of the members opposite, and I suspect that that's merely a foreshadowing of what might be to come.

On November 22, 2004, Mr. Speaker, the very wise citizens of Edmonton-Rutherford voted overwhelmingly for change. They were not alone. Across this province 53 per cent of those who voted voted for change. We as legislators and especially my hon. colleagues across the floor must always be mindful of that fact as we debate bills and motions that will shape the future of this province.

Now for a little history lesson. In the early spring of 1966 Arthur and Barbara Miller moved their growing family of three young boys – Richard, Lesley, and Donald – into a two-storey home on 52nd Avenue in the south Edmonton community of Pleasantview. They were soon to be joined by a daughter, Denise, in May of that year, and the family would grow and flourish with the neighbourhood.

Mr. Speaker, as the eldest child in that family I have many vivid memories of those early years on what was at that time the outskirts of the city. I particularly remember watching movies on a drive-in theatre screen from a second-floor bedroom window in our home. The drive-in theatre sat where the Southgate Shopping Centre is now located. Behind the drive-in theatre, Mr. Speaker, lay wide open farm fields for as far as my eyes could see. That vast expanse of farmland was the future constituency of Edmonton-Whitemud, which would later be renamed Edmonton-Rutherford following the redistribution that took place in 1993.

Almost as soon as we had moved into this neighbourhood, construction began on the communities of Duggan and Petrolia. I literally watched the Edmonton-Rutherford constituency grow as I myself was growing up. Over the years as young families grew, so did the community around them. Schools were built, shopping centres were added, freeways were constructed, parks and playgrounds were bustling with children. I think it's fair to say, Mr. Speaker, that this part of Edmonton was reflective of the general growth and prosperity that was sweeping across the province in the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s. The Miller family continued to grow and in 1972 was completed with the addition of my youngest brother, Howie.

In the 1980s, Mr. Speaker, Edmonton-Rutherford continued to expand southward. But the recession of 1983 created many challenges for all Albertans, and the residents of this constituency were certainly no exception to that.

By 1989 the people in Edmonton-Whitemud had become so restless and disenfranchised with the government of the day that they did what many had considered unthinkable. They elected my friend and mentor, Mr. Percy Wickman. In doing so, they unseated a sitting Premier even though his government did manage to maintain a majority. Throughout the 1990s Edmonton-Rutherford continued to grow southward past 23rd Avenue to the current boundary of Blackmud Creek and beyond.

Now, this little history lesson of mine is not without a purpose. As you know, Mr. Speaker, newly elected MLAs are provided with copies of the maiden speeches given by their recent predecessors. I would like to take a minute or two to share with you some of the quotes from the late Percy Wickman's maiden speech, which he delivered in this Assembly on June 5, 1989. Percy said: "The thing I find most remarkable is that people are asking, requesting, or demanding honest, open government." Does that sound familiar to anybody in this Assembly? I've certainly heard it before. He went on to say:

It is particularly disturbing when you go to high schools, like Harry Ainlay, and you hear . . . from students who say: "Why should I become involved in politics? Why should I be concerned, when I can't look up to my political leaders and have the respect I should?"

Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to digress for just a second here. I want to thank the hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock for establishing the School at the Legislature program. I've often been known to lament the lack of participation in politics by today's youth, and I think that this program in particular is an excellent initiative to try to reverse that trend.

8:40

Mr. Speaker, Percy Wickman went on to raise some serious concerns in 1989 about transportation, municipal affairs. In particular, he was concerned about the funding formula of the day. He had questions about health care as it related to Edmonton-Rutherford, education, the environment, the plight of the disabled, labour strife in the province, the lack of any real economic diversification, the waste of time and money on a senatorial election that nobody wanted, and the decline of the family farm. So you can see, Mr. Speaker, that the more things change, the more they really do stay the same.

Percy sums up by saying of the June 1 throne speech that year: I don't see a vision, a blueprint; it should be a master plan. Now, I imagine you know where I'm going with this. The concerns that Percy had heard from the electorate in 1989 are pretty much exactly the same concerns that I heard time and again from the people of Edmonton-Rutherford in 2004. Quite frankly, my response to last Wednesday's Speech from the Throne is pretty much identical as well. The people of Edmonton-Rutherford want and deserve a plan for the future that is truly visionary. I believe that in large part the Alberta Liberal Party's election campaign outlined what that vision should be, and I believe that the results show that the people of Edmonton-Rutherford share that vision.

Our leader, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, spoke of it in this Chamber on Thursday. The Alberta legacy act would see a concrete action plan instituted to ensure that all Albertans today and tomorrow would benefit from the truly unbelievable natural resource revenue that we are now experiencing. Our leader spoke about democratic reform and renewal, about allowing the people of this province to choose for themselves what changes they might want to see in our electoral and parliamentary systems.

Mr. Speaker, he spoke of the need to preserve a publicly funded health care system. I can assure the Premier and this government that the people of Edmonton-Rutherford are not interested in a third way or even a second way and certainly not a fourth way. They just

want to know that the health care system will be there when they need it. They want to know that they can get an ambulance in an emergency and that there will be a hospital bed, not a hallway gurney, awaiting every patient. They want to see the elimination of the health care premium tax, and they certainly do not want to pay \$500 or \$600 a month for health insurance. Establishing a wellness fund, creating a public drug plan, and improving long-term and seniors' care centres: these are visionary ideas that are attractive not only to the constituents of Edmonton-Rutherford but to all Albertans.

Funding the recommendations of the Learning Commission might not be visionary, but it is very clearly what people want, and we should be doing it now, not later. The Liberal plan for community schools is visionary, Mr. Speaker, and would prevent several school closures that we are likely to be seeing take place in this coming year. I, myself, am very pleased to see that the government is moving towards an endowment fund for postsecondary education. If we could only convince them now to adopt the Official Opposition's plan for reinvesting in the heritage savings trust fund, then we would be doing something that would benefit all Albertans for generations to come.

Speaking of vision, only the Official Opposition talked about creating an endowment fund for the arts and the humanities. With the wealth that we have in this province, we should be forward thinking and doing everything we can to ensure that our children will grow up and live in a well-rounded society and have as much exposure to the arts and culture community as possible.

Public auto insurance and a return to the regulation of the electrical and natural gas industries. Again, Mr. Speaker, this might not be seen as visionary, but it certainly is a recognition that there are some things that the government must be involved in. There is no doubt in my mind whatsoever that the constituents of Edmonton-Rutherford would agree.

Mr. Speaker, there was no mention in the throne speech of the proposed high-speed rail link between Edmonton and Calgary. If this Premier is truly looking for a legacy project, I want my grandchildren and my great-grandchildren to marvel at the fact that their forefathers did not wait until it was needed before we began planning and building something that we all know is a service that will be required eventually.

Mr. Speaker, last fall I personally visited nearly 10,000 homes in Edmonton-Rutherford. I spoke to literally thousands of residents, and those were some of the concerns that were expressed to me, some of the plans that they had hoped to see their government introduce. While the constituents of Edmonton-Rutherford may not have been successful in achieving the scope of change that they had hoped for, I have committed to represent them and their desire for that change to the very best of my ability in this Assembly.

In closing, I would like to take a moment to thank some of the people that have helped me over the years and some of the people that have helped the constituency of Edmonton-Rutherford. I would be remiss if I did not thank Mr. Ian McClelland for his three and a half years of service in this Assembly, so on behalf of all of the people in Edmonton-Rutherford I say thank you to Ian.

Mr. Speaker, I have an immeasurable debt of gratitude to my incredible team of campaign volunteers, who contributed in so many different ways to the very successful campaign last November. Of course, you will know that behind every candidate, win or lose, there is a supportive family entrusted with holding the home front together while we are out on the campaign trail. I would not be here today were it not for the support of my wife, Lois, our children Christopher and Kimberly, along with the watchful eye of our guardian angel, Nicole.

Lastly and most importantly, Mr. Speaker, I would like to say a

very gracious thank you to the voters of Edmonton-Rutherford for they have entrusted me with the responsibility of representing them during this our 100th year as a province and beyond. I believe that I am up to that task, and I have no intention of disappointing them.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29 kicks in, if anyone has any questions.

There being none, the chair recognizes the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and congratulations on your recent nomination.

It is an honour and privilege to stand and give my maiden speech in this Chamber. In November I was humbled by the trust that the constituents of Calgary-Hays placed in me to represent them in the Legislature. I look forward to representing their interests and addressing their concerns both here in the Chamber as well as in the constituency.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to formally introduce myself to my colleagues in this room. When I was elected to represent the people of Calgary-Hays, it signified the start of my third career in public service. In 1970 I joined the Canadian armed forces and served 10 years and retired with the rank of sergeant. During this time I had various postings, which included the Middle East, Cyprus, and Germany. I joined the Calgary Police Service in 1980 and served there for approximately 24 years before retiring in 2002-2003. During my previous two careers I served the public interest of all Canadians and then the citizens of Calgary. I look forward to continuing to represent the public interest of the constituents of Calgary-Hays and of all Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, in the past few months I have had the opportunity to meet and speak with many members of the communities I now represent, first as a candidate during the election and afterwards as their elected representative in this Legislature. These conversations allowed me to hear and respond to the issues that weigh most heavily on Albertans who call Calgary-Hays home.

Education, health care, and infrastructure were identified as the top three concerns. My constituents want to know that the government they elected will ensure that schooling, both primary and postsecondary, will be available and affordable for their children now and for years in the future. They want to know that their health care system will be able to handle the demands that are placed on it and that their grandchildren will be able to access the same if not a better level of care than we do today. Finally, they want to ensure that our road systems and other infrastructure will be up to the task of handling the volumes of traffic and usage that these systems will see as Alberta continues to grow.

The Speech from the Throne, delivered by the Lieutenant Governor, built on the pillars of the 20-year plan that were raised a year ago. Financially our province is in a very enviable position. We will soon be able to completely retire our debt. This will free up extra funds in the budget to address issues across the province.

As some of you may know, Calgary-Hays is a newly created constituency. Prior to last fall's election this constituency was the eastern part of Calgary-Shaw, but due to the explosive growth of this area two-thirds of Calgary-Shaw was split off to form Calgary-Hays. This riding is bordered by the city limits on the east, the Bow River on the west and south, and, it says, Glenmore Trail on the north, but that's not correct. It's the Bow River also on the north.

8:50

While this is a new constituency, we have had the great fortune to have one of the most innovative and forward-thinking projects being

undertaken within its borders. The construction of the newest hospital in my constituency is a fantastic example of the provincial investment into health infrastructure. The planned facility will give Calgarians and people in the surrounding area another point of service to access health care. The planned opening of the first phase in 2009 will add 350 beds to the health care system.

This health campus, as it is being called, will not only be a hospital; it will be an innovative facility. It will allow for multiple postsecondary educational institutions to train health care professionals in an entirely new way. This health campus represents the best in cross-ministry initiatives, where the goals of improving provincial infrastructure, increasing Albertans' access to health care, and ensuring that Alberta continues to be the leading edge in advanced education can be met through the completion of a single project.

Mr. Speaker, on the eve of our provincial centennial celebration Alberta is well positioned to continue being a world leader in many areas. With investments into projects such as the south Calgary health campus, Alberta is breaking new ground and discovering new solutions to old problems. I look forward to working with my constituents and colleagues here in the Legislature to ensure that the quality of life we enjoy today exists for future generations.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29. Any questions?

The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Prins: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a privilege to have the opportunity to rise tonight and respond to the Speech from the Throne. As I begin, I would like to congratulate our Lieutenant Governor, the Honourable Norman Kwong, on his appointment as our Queen's representative in Alberta, and I wish him all the best in his new position.

As this is my first speech in this House as a Member of the Legislative Assembly, I would like to take a moment to thank also the people of Lacombe-Ponoka for electing me as their representative.

Mr. Speaker, before I go any further, I would like to take this time to introduce my wife, Pauline, who is sitting up in the nosebleeds here on the other side. This afternoon you met my son Wayne. He was down from Fort McMurray. We also have three other children: Julia, who is studying for her master's degree in divinity in Vancouver; a son Mark, who is studying for his medical doctorate degree in Calgary; and Lorne, who is studying business at NAIT.

An Hon. Member: Your retirement fund.

Mr. Prins: That's my retirement fund. Correct.

Lacombe-Ponoka is a new constituency that was formed after the realignment of boundaries in 2004. Our constituency lies on the golden corridor in central Alberta. We enjoy both the benefits and challenges of an extremely active and growing economy. The Lacombe-Ponoka constituency is home to the largest ethylene plant in the world and about 20 additional related petrochemical plants which produce all kinds of products from ethylene: anhydrous ammonia, CO₂, nitrogen, oxygen, and many other products associated with these plants.

At Alix we have the largest single-cell malt plant in the world, processing more than 500 tonnes of barley per day and making it into malt. This is enough malt to make about 3 million litres of beer per day. Most of this malt is exported to the U.S. and Asia. [interjections] I think we do keep some at home.

Lacombe is home to a federal government agriculture research

station, which includes a meat research lab, and a provincial government agriculture research and plant breeding station. Plant breeding is important to both the feeding industry and the malt industry. The Lacombe provincial ag research station just released two new varieties of barley that outyield previous varieties and will soon be available to our farmers.

Lacombe-Ponoka is also home to a highly intensive agricultural industry. We have among the highest densities of livestock, both dairy and beef, hogs, chickens, vegetable greenhouses, seed potato farms in the province. This is in addition, of course, to all the traditional forms of crop production, which would include wheat, barley, oats, canola, corn, hay, and silage crops.

It is really an honour to represent my constituents, and I look forward to working with all my colleagues in tackling the issues that face our province. There are many areas addressed in the throne speech, but I'll restrict my comments to a few that are especially important to me and my constituency.

I was born in Lacombe to an immigrant family. We were not rich; we were not poor. We never lacked anything we needed. We always counted our blessings. My father came to Canada from Holland in 1939 at the age of 19. Soon after he arrived, the war started, and he enlisted in the Dutch army, which had actually started a unit in Stratford, Ontario. He served for five years in the Caribbean. At the end of the war he found himself in Holland again. This time when he came back to Canada, he brought with him a Dutch war bride. My mother came in 1947. They're both 84 years old now. They've been married almost 58 years. My father was here last week for the Speech from the Throne, which he enjoyed very much.

I have been a farmer for more than 30 years, and in representing a rural constituency, I believe the continuous support and expansion of our agrifood sector is one of the keys to achieving further diversification and prosperity for people throughout rural Alberta and all Albertans wherever they may work or live. While much work has been done toward growing the ag industry, there are many opportunities that remain untapped, particularly on the value-added front. With this in mind I encourage our government and the private sector to collaborate on diversification strategies, such as the rural development initiative, and encourage funding in ag research, especially plant breeding and crop sciences.

While I'm on the subject of agriculture, I know I'm not alone in expressing my disappointment with the recent court ruling in Montana which has delayed the opening of the U.S. border to Canadian cattle and beef products. This is extremely frustrating for our producers and everyone employed within this sector. However, I am confident that the provincial and federal governments will work with our neighbours to the south to resolve this impasse and have the border open to normal trade again.

In the interim our cattle producers have shown incredible resourcefulness and determination in adapting to the challenging economic realities. We've had some farms that have not survived this disaster. This is regrettable, and it caused some terrible hardships. We will continue to work with the cattle sector to help them through this difficult time.

As a member of the Standing Policy Committee on Agriculture and Municipal Affairs I'm looking forward to working with my colleagues and cattle producers toward the goal of normalizing trade relations with the United States and other international markets. We must ensure that our beef exports, be it cattle or packaged products, are safe and of the highest quality. However, this incident just reinforces the need to develop our own packing and processing industry within the province so that we are not as reliant on export of live animals, especially those over 30 months. Without a doubt,

Mr. Speaker, freedom of market access is extremely important to all our livestock farmers, not only those producing cattle and ruminants but also those producing hogs, which are affected by trade issues at this very time.

Listening to the Speech from the Throne, I was encouraged to hear that our government will continue to advocate for marketing choice for wheat and barley farmers. Providing Alberta wheat and barley producers with a marketing choice is a matter of fairness and marketing freedom. The combination of the global marketplace and marketing on the Internet is opening up new opportunities for producers to grow, process, add value, and market their products independently of the Canadian Wheat Board and generate greater revenues for farmers and producers. Technology has enabled producers to access niche markets, negotiate prices with buyers, organize transport arrangements independently of the CWB, and allowing these producers the freedom to choose how to market their products will enable them to take advantage of these opportunities and will finally place them on a par with their counterparts in eastern Canada and other countries, who have enjoyed this free market access for decades.

As I have previously mentioned, Mr. Speaker, development of rural Alberta is essential to our economic diversification and to the future prosperity of our province. One of the major prerequisites to having viable and sustainable rural communities is ensuring that they have access to all of the necessary resources and services, including water. It is too bad, but surface water is not a resource that is evenly distributed across this province. As a result, there are numerous communities which depend on groundwater or aquifer water in order to satisfy their domestic or municipal needs. This places great pressures upon existing groundwater resources.

9:00

From my personal experiences I have become increasingly aware of the challenges associated with freshwater distribution. Over the past years I have travelled several times to Africa, in fact six times to Sierra Leone in west Africa, to help build safe and reliable water systems that can be used both for human consumption and for commerce. These were very simple systems, but they produced immediate results in social and economic spinoffs.

Here within our province I've also been active in this particular area. As reeve of Lacombe county I was a founding member of the North Red Deer River Regional Water Services Commission, which collaborated with various levels of government to gain approval and, hopefully, funding for the construction of the North Red Deer River regional water project. And I say "hopefully" because at this very moment in time they tendered out the project. It was about \$4 million more than what they had hoped for, and the communities will probably be back to the government to see if we can help them out again.

Once completed, this system will distribute much-needed water from the Red Deer River, treated by the city of Red Deer, to the towns of Blackfalds, Lacombe, Ponoka, the counties of Lacombe and Ponoka, and the First Nation reserve at Hobbema. Aside from providing water services to these communities, the north Red Deer River regional water system is considered an environmentally sound solution, as it helps conserve groundwater resources, which, instead of being used to satisfy municipal demands, can be used for farm and agricultural purposes. We hope such an arrangement will enable our farmers to enjoy a reliable source of water for domestic use and livestock watering needs while also helping preserve the groundwater aquifers.

The town of Lacombe, currently with a population of around 10,000, uses about 220 million gallons of water a year; it's about a billion litres. This amount of water is approximately equal to what

about a hundred average size livestock farms may consume annually. So you can see that as the town of Lacombe was using water, 220 million gallons a year, it was starting to affect the availability of water on the nearby farms.

I would like to point out that interbasin transfer systems are consistent with the Water for Life strategy, which calls for better management of our water resources and supplies. I'm fully convinced of the merits of this system, and I look forward to working with the ministries involved in this project and expanding it throughout the province and helping ensure that our water resources are preserved for generations to come. I also look forward to working with my colleagues to determine an affordable and sustainable solution for funding municipal water systems.

Speaking of future generations, Mr. Speaker, I would like to commend two of my colleagues, the Minister of Advanced Education and the Minister of Education, on their commitment to ensuring that our education system remains sufficiently funded and that our students receive the best instruction possible in the greatest schools in the world. Our schools have excellent teachers, programs, and curriculum. Our students have a good choice of schools to attend and have shown their excellence by posting world-class results in achievement tests.

During the Speech from the Throne I was pleased to hear that the government has a plan in place to improve access to advanced education. As the hon. Lieutenant Governor announced, the province plans to add 60,000 new spaces to our postsecondary system by the year 2020, 15,000 of which will come in the next three years. I commend the government on this commitment, and I hope that the province fully supports all postsecondary institutions, public and independent alike, in their efforts to create more student spaces.

The Canadian University College, located in the Lacombe-Ponoka constituency, is one of several independent, not-for-profit postsecondary institutions accredited to grant specific degrees at the university level. Many of these independent institutions are expanding their capacity and contributing to the goal of creating new spaces for Alberta's postsecondary students. Although independent universities are assisting the province in its long-term goals, efforts to expand their capacity are not being funded by the province.

Once such example, Mr. Speaker, is Edmonton's King's University College. This year King's is investing \$6 million to create about 400 new spaces to meet the growing demands and help keep many of our students here in Alberta. Also, Concordia University College in Edmonton is currently spending \$10 million on an expansion program at no cost to the government. While these projects are not huge in comparison to the U of A or the U of C, it is important to note that these institutions are not coming to the government looking for capital funding. They are paying for their own expansion projects using donations from supporters.

Being from a constituency that boasts about 1,500 to 2,000 students attending the independent schools, one of the highest concentrations in the province, I am aware of numerous independent schools that are providing cutting-edge education to our students. I believe these schools are a huge asset, as they not only provide choice and quality education to their students, but they also help alleviate some of the pressure on our public school system. As any other institution they teach the mandatory curriculum that is prescribed by the province, and for this portion of their instruction I feel they should receive full and equitable funding from the government.

Ensuring that these schools are financially healthy means that they can continue to complement our public and separate school systems and help keep class sizes down. If any of them had to be shut down due to inadequate funding, the public system would have to absorb,

in some cases, large numbers of new students. This could increase class sizes and place additional financial pressure on the public system. With this in mind I believe that fully funding the independent schools, both K to 12 and postsecondary, for the mandatory portion of their curriculum is not only in the best interests of our students but the province as well.

The last topic I would like to briefly touch upon, Mr. Speaker, is seniors. As chair of the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta I'm pleased the province is continuing to respond to the needs of our seniors. Throughout their working lives our seniors have been dedicated to seeing Alberta grow into a prosperous province and a vibrant society. They were instrumental in creating the Alberta advantage, so I believe that as they reach their golden years, we should be compassionate and responsive to their needs to make sure that they are able to enjoy the fruits of their labour. With this in mind I'm committed to working with the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports and all my colleagues in this House in finding ways of reducing burdens upon our seniors.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank you again for the opportunity to speak today and to voice my optimism for the future of our great province. I look forward to working with my constituents.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29 kicks in. Anyone have any questions?

There being none, the chair recognizes the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first time speaking to this Assembly is not my first time speaking from this floor. Thanks to an invitation from the Model Legislature in November my first time speaking here was with youth of the province, part of a provincial community with whom I've spent the last 30 years of my life.

My life journey began in the Crowsnest Pass and led to the capital region. It's a journey I shared in part with my husband of 32 years, Dick Mather, who served on the Edmonton public school board and on city council. My being here today marks the end of one vocation and the beginning of another. It marks a return to the classroom to experience life again as a student. It is the beginning of a new set of associates, colleagues, and new friends. Yet with these new beginnings, Mr. Speaker, there are some things that I'm not leaving behind. Chief of these is my constituency, in which I've served as an educator and which I now represent.

For three decades I've worked in one of Edmonton's most diverse and dynamic communities. Thirty-five years ago Mill Woods did not exist. The town that makes up Edmonton's southeast quadrant has grown from nothing to become a community of close ties and co-operation. For the past 10 years I've sat on the Mill Woods President's Council, where I've seen a growth in strength, achievement, and self-respect.

Edmonton is Alberta's most diverse city. It is a representative Canadian city, multicultural before the word became fashionable. Mill Woods is built on and has extended that tradition. The people of Mill Woods with whom I work hold passionately to Canadian values and believe in the Alberta opportunity. They care for each other and take their citizenship seriously. To serve this community is a privilege and a responsibility, and I sincerely thank them for giving me the opportunity to serve as their member. I thank them for their encouragement as I went door to door, and I thank those who volunteered on the campaign trail and my family for its support. I acknowledge my predecessor, Dr. Don Massey, whose 11 years as an MLA were a model of service and representation that I intend to follow.

9:10

A majority of my constituents are new Canadians, Mr. Speaker, yet many of them have a clearer sense of the Canadian identity than some of my generation who have lived here for a lifetime. Catering to our diversity has not weakened our social fabric; it has made us stronger. My constituents' range of religious beliefs and practices is not something we have to tiptoe around. It is a source of strength, an opportunity for exploration when we get together. One of them said to me recently: you know, it doesn't matter what we call God. I have been blessed and enriched to be part of talks where we have shared our deepest values. Our values, what really matters to us and not just what we say we believe, are an expression of what binds us together.

Another part of my past life that I've not left behind in coming here is my commitment to education. Alberta led the country in the adoption of progressive education in the 1930s under the hon. William Aberhart. Mr. Aberhart was an educator himself who served as Minister of Education as well as Premier. While he held conservative religious views, he defended the teaching of evolution as part of a liberal arts education, a heritage he prized. In the past decade Edmonton has led the continent in the offering of educational choices.

Education is a lifelong experience. We are learning from our time in the womb until we draw our last breath. We are aware of seniors who have gone in search of new adventures, of physical challenge, travel, and university degrees, and we hear regularly of new findings of incredible learning feats by the very young. It is in this connection that I raise the shadow portfolio I have been assigned, that of Children's Services.

The children's services undertaken by this government began with a safety net for those who, as a result of poverty, family breakup, and other factors, found themselves without the supports once provided by the extended family. In the current debate on national child care I sometimes come up against the belief that it's not the job of the state to be providing a universal care system that many people prefer to undertake for themselves. Yet no one I've talked to who may feel this way doubts that there is a place for the state in education.

Mr. Speaker, we have made an arbitrary division between child care and education. No one who has worked with children and youth in the public education system as I have would doubt that a large part of effective education consists of providing a supportive environment of caring relationships where learning can take place. Likewise, no one can spend time with young children in their own homes, nurseries, daycare centres, and play groups and doubt that education is taking place.

Mr. Speaker, it's time to expand our focus on children from the basic mandate of a single department. In the 1970s the Lougheed government established early childhood services, an amalgam of health, social work, education, and psychology that became the basis of this province's public kindergarten program. Its focus extended beyond preschool to an integrated and organic approach to life and learning. Its benchmark was not standardized testing but an ongoing assessment of social, physical, intellectual, cultural, and emotional growth of each child. In the past decade we have lost this wider focus on children, and we need to regain it. It is not enough for us to repeat that children are our future and then look at them as an endless supply for our workforce and as consumers for a well-oiled economy. We need to start with children now and be aware of how choices we make in all areas of life and public policy impact on them.

Mr. Speaker, I commend the government's launch of Alberta's Promise initiative for children, and I thank my worthy opponent the

hon. Minister of Children's Services for sending me a little red wagon so that I can show my support of this initiative. I urge the government to expand the leadership and participation of this program beyond party and sector so that all who are involved in work with children can relate to it in some way.

I also invite the government to assess the impact of all areas of public policy on children. Such an assessment would include Alberta Health, Education, Justice, Environment, and small business. In fact, it would be incumbent for an agency to show how its work does not affect children. The mark of an advanced society is seen in how it treats its smallest and youngest members. Let us show that Alberta in its second century belongs in that league.

A third part of my life I expect to continue to practice in my new vocation is the role of communicator. That's a role I learned and partnered with my husband, Dick, who worked in media before entering politics. It's a role I fostered in my leadership at J. Percy Page high school in the planning and building of the TeleLearning Centre. It's an inherent part of my role as a representative in the Legislature, for to be a representative is to 're-present' views and experiences until they become part of another's reality.

To be a communicator is more than to be a speaker. It's more than to be a spokesperson for the people I represent. It's to be a builder of consensus. Communicate and communion share the same roots. To commune is to spend time together. It means to listen and observe as well as to show and tell. It means to encourage others to find their own way to say something rather than to get them on side with me.

It is in this conviction that I have taken the step into the world of politics. I believe there is far more that we hold in common than the issues that we say divide us. The most pressing issues of our time, as the Asian tsunami brought into focus, are not the divisions of Liberals or Conservatives or Alliance or New Democrats or even Canadians or Albertans; they are human issues, and our response to them will depend on our human values.

I've received welcomes from members in all quarters of this building. To you, Mr. Speaker, and to the security staff and Clerk's office I give my thanks for easing my transition here. This has been a reminder of another new beginning, when I had to learn to get around in a new way after a car accident. My work in this Assembly will be in the same spirit.

To my counterpart in the government, the hon. Minister of Children's Services, I have promised to do my utmost to raise the profile of her portfolio with her cabinet and caucus colleagues. To my neighbour the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner I extend my concerns for the rural constituencies of this province at a challenging time. With him and others on this side of the House I share a belief in our need for a more grassroots democracy.

To conservatives who want to live by the principle of conserving what is best in our society as well as in our environment, I add my support against a cynicism that feels that we must roll over before the strong and powerful in order to be on the winning side. To democrats who are willing to explore new ideas for renewing our democracy, I offer a sympathetic ear and an open mind. Last, to my colleagues to whom the word liberal is more than a label but a description of a wise and tolerant generosity, I pledge my part to articulate a new vision for Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, I see an Alberta where urban and rural communities recognize each other's value and can support each other's concerns. I see an Alberta where youth and seniors see each other's strengths and hear their stories. I see an Alberta where resources contribute to the quality of life and where people are not human resources but our focus. I see an Alberta where workers are cobuilders of the dream and management takes initiative to facilitate leisure and

family life. I see an Alberta where our outdoor spaces stretch our inner spaciousness and the environment is not the concern of lobby groups but the treasure of all. I see an Alberta where faith is not competing creeds but a shared valued and hope is not wishful thinking but energizing confidence in the gifts we share.

9:20

Mr. Speaker, the members of my party, in common with some members of every party in this Assembly, believe there is a better way to do the business of government. Parties may differ in their social and spending priorities, but many of us truly believe in a democracy that is open to the best input from our fellow citizens, with decision-making closer to the people who live with the impact of these decisions.

Alberta Liberals are not positioning ourselves to become the next dynasty to rule the province for 40 years. In fact, if we are successful in the democratic reforms we are proposing, we will close the possibility for any party to develop that kind of headlock on government. No party has a monopoly on truth.

If the government brings in proposals that are good for this province and its peoples, I and my colleagues will not be opposed. If the government changes proposals that we criticized earlier and its changes are positive, we will not blame it for changing its mind. When we criticize, we will be constructive. We may propose alternative legislation even if it never comes to a vote. Mr. Speaker, there may be times when, faced with a measure we believe to be harmful, all we can do is to oppose. When we do this, we are still the loyal opposition. The ultimate loyalty of all members of this Assembly is not to a party or leader but to values that unite Albertans.

What are these values, above party and politics? Let's look at our provincial motto. Alberta's motto, strong and free, is also a line in our national anthem. What are these qualities we've chosen to highlight, to stand on guard for?

It takes strength to admit mistakes or to change our minds. To be rigid or self-righteous isn't strong; it's brittle. It takes strength to be vulnerable and compassionate. To be hard, unfeeling, to keep all comers at bay isn't strong; it's defensive. It takes strength, courage, character to be in a tough situation without complaining, blaming, or throwing one's weight around. To be pushy or loud isn't strength; it's aggression. We show our strength and influence in the quality of our presence.

We show our freedom in our willingness to think outside the box. To say that we don't need anyone and can go it alone doesn't prove that we're free; it shows that we're afraid of dialogue and discussion. To be free is to be able to listen to and consider many points of view. To say that nobody's going to tell me what to do isn't freedom; it's stubbornness, slavery to habit. To be free is to be able to enter relationships, to be connected to others, to admit our interdependence. To refuse to be tied down isn't freedom; it's fear of commitment.

To be strong and free isn't to strut or swagger; it's to move and speak with dignity. It takes presence, it takes empathy, it takes conviction, and it takes class. That's the kind of member, the kind of model, the kind of citizen, and the kind of human being I seek to be.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29? Any questions?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods for a very eloquent maiden speech. I do, however, want to ask her one question, to ask her if

she knows that children are a primary focus of this government and that we have numerous programs for our children because we know that they're the number one concern that we have.

We have initiated programs like Amber Alert; parental leave; parent link centres; supports for families of children with disabilities, a new program in Canada that's there primarily to give family support so that they don't fall apart because of the extra needs of special needs children; the accredited child care programs that are among the first in Canada; the Great Kids awards, that recognize kids that aren't necessarily the brightest or the smartest but have contributed to their communities; a Youth Secretariat that recognizes our youth and has them participate in our programs; the youth at risk and youth in care bursaries that we provide for kids that aren't the smartest and don't have parents and we're their guardians and we want them to go on further in education; a new approach to adoption, which gets more kids into loving homes; a new child welfare program, called Alberta Response Model, that makes sure that we don't tear them out of their homes but try to teach parents to be better parents first because we know that tearing them away from their family is as traumatic as whatever is going on in that home; the bicycle helmet law; the child prostitution laws; the FASD initiatives that are among the best in Canada, that we have here in Alberta; our crystal meth workshops that had the youth participate. I just wanted to ask if you were aware of those programs.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, this segment was supposed to be brief questions, brief responses. I'll accept that for now.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, if you so choose, you may respond; you're not forced to.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will respond briefly.

I am aware of all of those wonderful things in Alberta. I believe that we need to stretch even further and go beyond that. We live in the richest place on earth. There should be no child in poverty. There should be no child living without security or safety.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: There being no other questions, the chair recognizes the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am honoured and, in fact, amazed that I am standing in this room, the Legislature of the province of Alberta, and about to deliver what is known as my maiden speech. It's been a very long time since the term "maiden" has been applied to me, but I'll take it.

The swearing-in ceremony was for me a very moving moment. I am awestruck when I remember your words that only 763 people over the 100-year history of this Legislature have actually been sworn in with the responsibility to govern their fellow citizens, an awesome responsibility when you really think of it, and I do take these responsibilities that I swore to uphold seriously. I want to govern with fairness, openness, and accountability.

I would like to congratulate the Lieutenant Governor, His Honour Norman Kwong, on his investiture. I have great confidence in his ability to carry out his duties with humility and wit. He will leave his mark on the history of this province. I had the privilege of signing the memorial book for our wonderful former Lieutenant Governor, Lois Hole. I wrote that her example of courage, compassion, and caring, and her strength of character to stand up for what she believed in set an example for all of us and one that I would fashion my public life after. Only time will tell.

Mr. Speaker, how appropriate that today is International Women's Day because I am going to honour the women in my life: those that

gave me life, those whom I gave life to, and those who sustain and influence my life. I do not stand here alone. I did not get here alone. Behind me are my three daughters – Florence, Shelagh, and Bridget junior – my granddaughters Kerstin and Skye, and my son-in-law Kirk, who, although he is badly outnumbered, has learned to hold his own, also a large family of siblings and their families, who are spread all across Canada, and, in particular, my only sister, Florence, a Manitoba Liberal.

Mr. Speaker, I returned to school at 45 years of age and became a nurse, which awakened in me the latent belief in social justice taught to me so many years ago. I come from a long line of strong women who understood the paramount importance of fairness. The first immigrant ancestor five generations ago was une fille du roi, a girl of the king. They were the young women from France who came alone to the new world to create life and build life to a viable society. The hardships were many. My mother, Florence, was from that line. She owned and ran a manufacturing agency in 1935 which sold taps, dies, drills, and wooden axe handles to Ashdowns. I can guarantee that she was the only woman in that game. My three aunts, who had successful professional careers, remained maiden as a result of all the men who did not return from World War II.

I was educated by nuns. Believe me; they don't come any tougher. By that I mean that they set high standards for social justice. Caring for the poor amongst us and being good stewards of the blessings given to us were at the top of their lists. I come by my Liberal leanings honestly.

But I did not get here by myself. There were many people who believed in me and what I stood for. They believed in the importance of all voices, opinions, and diverse views being heard. They believed, as I, that open discussion is paramount to good governing practices. They believed in the clear, well-thought-out policies and the vision of the Liberal Party for this province. Many of those policies were developed in no small way by Dr. Ken Nicol and successfully articulated by our present Alberta leader, the Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

9:30

I did not get here by myself. Adelle Downs and Kirk Mearns and their small but very effective election team worked extremely hard to get me elected. Sixteen-hour days, seven days a week were the norm, and there were thousands who showed their confidence in me by voting for me, and they do expect me to ask the tough questions and debate the issues.

His Honour the Lieutenant Governor said he had big shoes to fill. I, too, have big shoes to fill as I am representing the constituency of Lethbridge-East, formerly held by Dr. Ken Nicol, the former leader of the Alberta Liberal Party, a man who set the bar high in terms of the respect he garnered in this House, in the province, and in the constituency. Mr. Speaker, between Lois Hole and Ken Nicol I sure have my work cut out for me.

My constituency is one-half of the city of Lethbridge, and I believe that because of that division the city is uniquely represented to this body in a balanced way. I share the representation with my Assembly colleague on the other side of the House, the hon. Minister for Economic Development. The representation is male and female, Liberal and Conservative, business and humanities, experienced and inexperienced, all of which in my mind equals the many diverse views that are held in our city. It represents balance. Mr. Speaker, balance is good.

Lethbridge has a population of 72,712, continues to grow, and with new census figures to be released this fall, I'm sure it'll be the third-largest city in Alberta.

We have the University of Lethbridge, whose business school and education faculty are renowned across Canada, a university that

recognizes the importance of wellness and is building a wellness complex that will serve not only the university but also the southern Alberta community. However, Mr. Speaker, this infrastructure does not come cheap, which is why it's important for this government to step up to the plate and fund projects that affect our future in a very significant way. We have the Lethbridge Community College, that has worked with industry to try and encourage apprenticeship programs. We have two research stations, and Lethbridge has the greatest number of PhDs on a per capita basis in Canada.

Lethbridge has the lowest cost of doing business and the lowest personal cost of living. Lethbridge has a 25-member, community-based economic development office which has been successful in attracting five new, large businesses to our community within the last two years. However, Mr. Speaker, despite this good news I can't say enough about BSE and the devastating effect it has had on my constituency and the extended community.

We have the Prairie Baseball Academy, where the young men of summer come to dream in the winter. Our academy, under the dedicated leadership of coach Blair Kubicek, trains young men not only to play baseball but to grow into mature and responsible citizens. Coach has sent many a young man to play in the majors or earn scholarships to American universities. The boys go to university or college and must maintain at the very least a 2.5 grade point average.

But, Mr. Speaker, it isn't all la-la land. There are great concerns. As a former municipal alderman I was very disappointed to see a P3 relationship for the ring roads for Calgary and Edmonton and only \$3 billion. I can't believe I just said "only \$3 billion." That's a lot of money. But I did, and I know that after years of downloading infrastructure responsibilities by this government onto municipal governments, there are huge infrastructure needs that \$3 billion will only begin to address.

In southern Alberta it's imperative that highway 3 be twinned from the Saskatchewan border to the B.C. border. The Canamex highway will bring goods from the north, but not all are destined for the far south. They will branch off and go east and west as well as the goods that come from the B.C. interior that will use highway 3 and then go south.

Mr. Speaker, as a resident of Lethbridge I am horrified that this government would allow blatant discrimination in this province on a geographic basis. I speak of cutting off southern flights, for instance south of Calgary to the municipal airport but continuing to allow flights from the north to land. After all, Edmonton is everyone's capital. The famous flights of our Premier to that very airport would surely point out the authenticity of this argument.

The North American trend in the airline industry is for charter aircraft to provide more direct routes to small city airports. For instance, Denver has many airports allowing choices of where to land depending on what part of the city you're going to do business in. More importantly, it saves many hours off a trip by not having to go through large and overly busy international hub airports when the objective is not to make a connection. Most North American cities, given this new paradigm of travelling for business, would kill to have the opportunity to have a city airport for fixed-wing aircraft. Helicopters' costs are prohibitive to most business travelers.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, my last kick at the cat, at least for tonight: the need for provincial standardized care for our vulnerable elderly or those in long-term care. We would not let babies cry. Why are we letting our vulnerable seniors cry? Seniors don't cry out loud. They sit and they inwardly pray: please answer my bell; please come; I only want to go to the bathroom; I just want to be turned because my arm has gone to sleep, and I can't; I just need to be fed; I just want to feel human. They wait because of staff shortages or,

in the case of assisted living or designated living, having to pay extra costs for these services because what they're entitled to is so minimal. I pray that none of us here in this House, or more so our parents, will experience that indignity, the indignity of only being a commodity on a bottom line.

We can as a collective Assembly do better, and we must. We owe it to ourselves and to the people who expect us to govern fairly, openly, honestly, and to be accountable. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29 kicks in.

Nobody wishing to ask a question, I'll recognize the hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great honour for me to rise today in response to the Speech from the Throne and to address this Assembly for the first time. I'm truly humbled to be counted amongst the hon. members on both sides of this August body, and I will try very hard to further the work of inspiring members present and past.

May I begin by offering my congratulations to the hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock on his return to the Speaker's chair. I also offer my congratulations to the Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees, the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, and indeed to you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to briefly introduce to you and through you to this Assembly the Peace River constituency that I am so proud to represent. Lying in the extreme northwest corner of this province, settlement in the Peace River constituency began when the North-West Company established a trading post on the Peace River between Fort Chipewyan and Fort Dunvegan. This post, known as Fort Vermilion, was established in 1788 and is the oldest agricultural settlement in the province.

The original post was moved five miles to its current location in 1831 as settlement in the area expanded, and it exists as a thriving community today. In fact, Mr. Speaker, the old Bay House still stands after many years of service as the family home for Hudson's Bay Company representatives. During its service it even housed the family of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud and indeed fostered his early career. The house is an empty shell today, but it remains an important historical feature in the community, and I commend the hard-working group of volunteers there who have fought to preserve it.

Other settlements grew in the area, also established as trading posts to facilitate the growing fur trade. Most notable of these is the area of the present-day town of Peace River, which began life as St. Mary's House in the early 1800s.

9:40

As the province of Alberta was established, the constituency of Peace River came into existence in 1905. It has changed shape and undoubtedly character since then, but it has always retained the name. The first elections were held, and the constituency sent its first representative to the Legislature in 1905. That didn't work out too well, Mr. Speaker, so we sent another one in 1906. Peace River has been ably represented ever since, most recently by the hon. Gary Friedel, whose hard work and dedication I would like to recognize here.

Mr. Speaker, the constituency has always been characterized by a pioneer spirit, and this continues even today. Where once we were at the edge of the expansion of the fur trade, we later found ourselves at the edge of agricultural expansion in the province. Still later the forest and energy industries pushed their way northward and today play a vital role in the area economy.

Mr. Speaker, as the economy grew and diversified, the region grew, and today the constituency is home to over 30,000 people. These people are diverse in heritage and culture and language and religion, but they are united in a belief in and a love for the north. We believe that the north is the new economic engine of the province and is poised to assume its role in supplying the benefits that all Albertans enjoy.

Because of these beliefs, Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to hear the agenda of this government as set forth in the throne speech. I am pleased that the government has outlined such strong support for rural communities across the province and for their agricultural base. We in the north are concerned for our rural future, and I am pleased with the commitments made. I am also pleased by a strong commitment to innovation in health care, for I believe that continued spending expansion will harm not help our health care system. I am very pleased to see such a strong commitment to postsecondary education access and delivery. This is the vital engine that will indeed provide our access to the future, and I agree that now is the time to act.

But, Mr. Speaker, I'm perhaps most pleased with the strong commitment to infrastructure. I believe that Alberta can fuel its continuing economic miracle by supporting regions of expansion in this province. These regions need help to build healthy, safe, and attractive communities that are able to draw and support people and services. I agree that we should make Alberta the best province in which to live, work, and play. Our continued economic prosperity is vital to this goal.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I am pleased that the government has recognized that there is work to do to ensure that all Albertans benefit from the prosperity we enjoy, and I support the initiatives outlined.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, I would again offer my congratulations and my thanks to you for your support. I would also like to thank the people of the Peace River constituency, who have chosen to place their trust in me. I wish to convey to them that I deeply understand the responsibilities this includes, and I would like to provide now my solemn promise to be a tireless advocate for the Peace River constituency during my time here.

With your permission I would now move that we adjourn debate. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

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

Mr. Stevens: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I move that the Assembly adjourn until 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.

[Motion carried; at 9:42 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]