

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

**Title: Thursday, February 23, 2006**

**1:30 p.m.**

Date: 06/02/23

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

### Prayers

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

Let us pray. Give to each member of this Legislature a strong and abiding sense of the great responsibilities laid upon us. Give us a deep and thorough understanding of the needs of the people we serve. Amen.

Please be seated.

head:

### Introduction of Guests

**Mrs. McClellan:** Mr. Speaker, it is a very great pleasure for me to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a lady that is sitting in your gallery. Dianne Johnson is the wife of our esteemed colleague Mr. LeRoy Johnson, and she is seated, as I say, in your gallery. I'd ask her to rise and receive the very, very warm welcome of this Legislature.

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

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Thank you. Mr. Speaker, it's my great pleasure to introduce to you and through you a number of special student visitors from W.P. Wagner who are here or will be here very shortly. In any case, I'd like to introduce them and thank them for coming, along with their group leaders Stan Bissell and Stacey Mabey. Please give them the warm welcome.

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

**Mr. Horner:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the House 49 guests from Rivière Qui Barre, the Camilla school. They are a great group of students who are energetic and eager to learn. They are accompanied by teachers Mr. Mike Paustian and Ms Amanda Langford, teacher aides Mrs. Arlene Whitson and Mrs. Carol Brailey, and parent helpers Ms Anita Lischewski and Ms Brenda Hansen. I believe they are in our gallery, and I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

**Mr. Lindsay:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you two groups of students today from the Duffield school who are seated in both the members' and the public galleries. The first group is a group of grade 9 students, 16 of them in total, accompanied by Sharon Smith and Marilee Godfrey.

The second group is 31 grade 6 students who are attending the School at the Legislature this week; their teacher, Mrs. Barb Daum; their assistant, Mrs. Charlotte Curtis; and their parent helper, Mrs. Shelley Charlet. These students will play a significant role in the future of our province, and I would ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

**Dr. Brown:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House my

nephew, John Brown. He's seated in the public gallery. John is 13 years old. He's currently enrolled in grade 8 at Millarville community school. He's an excellent student, and he's involved in school sports. He's currently a member of the school's basketball team. I would ask John to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

**The Speaker:** The hon. leader of the third party.

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Pat Spady and Sylvia Krogh. Pat and Sylvia are both part of the keep medicare public vigil committee. This committee, organized by concerned citizens of all political stripes, will be holding vigils on the steps of the Legislature throughout the session. Pat is accompanied by her grandson Sam, and they are seated in the public gallery. I would ask that they rise and receive the warm traditional 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 this Assembly four guests seated in the public gallery. I'd ask that they rise as I call out their names: Allan Dane, Jean McBean, Sylvia Galbraith, and Audrey Brooks. These four individuals are community activists and are concerned with the government's privatization plans for health care. They all attended the vigil held on the steps of the Legislature today, and I would now ask that they receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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### Oral Question Period

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

### Government Policy Reforms

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a delight to rise in this new sitting and engage in another round of questions. A strong and informed leader is absolutely necessary to a well-functioning government. [some applause]

**The Speaker:** Hon. leader, sometimes it's difficult for the chair to determine who the applause is for.

**Dr. Taft:** I agree. I wasn't sure myself, Mr. Speaker.

Long-term policies must be set and implemented by a Premier who is fully accountable for his actions and decisions. Right now this does not exist with this government. [interjections] I can see this is going to be a fun spring.

My questions are to the Premier. Given that this government has made numerous threats to further privatize our province's health care system under a Premier who has admitted that he won't be running in the next election, will this government hold off on any policy reforms until they have a leader in place who will be accountable to the voters for the policies he sets?

**Mr. Klein:** Mr. Speaker, I'm so happy the Leader of the Official Opposition asked the question. Here's the problem. I'm going to articulate the problem, and I hope everyone is listening. We have requests from regional health authorities ranging from 9 to 20 per cent. Even at the minimum, that is about three times the rate of inflation. That is the problem: 9 to 20 per cent. To put it into perspective, that's \$900 million if it's 9 per cent; that's \$2 billion if

it's 20 per cent. That's putting it into perspective. That is the problem.

Now, we have come up with some ideas that will resolve some of the problem – some of the problem – we think. If the opposition parties – and I will challenge the media to ask them this question – or the Friends of Medicare or the Raging Grannies or any other group have solutions to bring costs back in line with the rate of inflation and to increase access, please send them forward. They have offered no solutions whatsoever.

1:40

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

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question was actually about accountability.

Again to the Premier: will the Premier once and for all inform this House when he will be retiring so that we know when to expect meaningful long-term policy decisions?

**Mr. Klein:** Mr. Speaker, I can't give you the exact date, but it will be sometime in the late fall of 2007 or perhaps the early winter of 2008. But relative to the exact date I haven't figured that out yet.

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

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you. Again to the Premier: given that the unofficial race to become the next Premier is leading to policy gridlock in this government, what is this Premier doing to get this tired old government making decisions again?

**Mr. Klein:** Mr. Speaker, nothing has resulted in gridlock. As a matter of fact, we are proceeding and proceeding quite well as a government relative to policy decisions. There are all the ministers relative to the front bench – I've talked with most of them, not all of them – and the policy development taking place in their departments is absolutely outstanding. I wish the opposition would take some time – well, no, that would require too much work – to find out what is happening relative to policy development in each and every department. It's absolutely outstanding.

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

### Registry System Security

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The shocking revelations uncovered today about the lack of action taken by this government in response to years of documented abuse of our registry system have an impact not only in Alberta but around the world. The threat of increased international terrorism has countries around the world tightening up security regulations from passports to drivers' licences to birth certificates. Unfortunately for Albertans, Alberta's private registry and the Ministry of Government Services have failed to follow suit. To the Minister of Government Services: following the events of September 11, 2001, can the minister explain to the House what increased security measures were imposed on Alberta's privately owned registries?

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

**Mr. Lund:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's good that the hon. member would ask that question because it does give me an opportunity to outline a whole number of issues that we have taken

over the last couple or three years. It's interesting to see that they haven't changed their tactics. They're still using the *Edmonton Journal* as their chief source of research. I have read the articles that are printed in there, and quite frankly this stuff that's printed in there is basically all two and three years old.

Since a number of issues have arisen, we've put in a number of things. Currently drivers' licences are not printed at the registry. That's what used to happen. We used to have break-ins; we had material go missing. So we've plugged that hole. We're the first province in Canada to come out with the facial recognition licence. That's not done in every other province, but we do it in Alberta. We have also stepped up all of our security within the registries themselves. For example, the people that have access to the private information all have a code number, and they have to abide by the codes.

We'll continue this later.

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

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: how much of that missing material, including blank licences, has actually been accounted for, the material that he indicated was stolen?

**Mr. Lund:** Well, Mr. Speaker, these were break-ins that occurred back in 2003 and 2002. Some of that material, of course, was not recovered. However, it doesn't have any value currently. It has no value currently. The new drivers' licences have got identity things on them that we're not prepared to discuss in public because, of course, if we reveal what exactly is on there that's secure, then people trying to mimic them would have that information, so we're not doing that. They're encased in a certain material, and that's not just normal plastic. I can tell you that. So there's that issue, and of course they're produced by the Canadian Bank Note. Like I mentioned earlier, the facial recognition.

As far as the registries are concerned, we currently have on staff 15 inspectors. If we ever get a tip that there might be something going on in a registry, we can follow it. On top of that, we do very detailed, unannounced audits on at least 80 registries every year.

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

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that the number of falsely obtained drivers' licences remains so high and the credibility of Alberta's licences is so low that the province of B.C. has threatened to end an agreement under which Alberta's drivers' licences can be exchanged for one from B.C., what has the minister done to eliminate falsely obtained or fake licences from the streets of Alberta from circulating?

**Mr. Lund:** Mr. Speaker, there should be some kind of rule against making those kinds of statements in this House because people should be honest when they come in here. The fact is that we work closely with the registries in B.C. and the B.C. government, and they have never indicated that there's any problem with our licences. None. There's a reciprocal agreement in place. There's never been any indication that any other province has a problem with our licence.

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

**Mr. Elsalhy:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In October 1993 the then Minister of Municipal Affairs stated that it was ludicrous to suggest

that privatizing Alberta's registries could lead to potential security breaches. In September '02 Criminal Intelligence Service Alberta noted that some of the private registry offices in this province "continue to be compromised by individuals operating on behalf of different groups." In February '06 it's reported that members of organized crime have infiltrated this province's registries, potentially gaining unfettered access to personal information on Albertans. The question to the Minister of Government Services: given that your government was warned about these security breaches more than three years ago, why has this government ignored this alarming problem?

**Mr. Lund:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I just went through a whole number of things that we've implemented. There's even more that we've done, and I'll indicate another one. We require that every person that has access to personal information has to go through a security check. They have to then get a password number that they can use to gain access. What that does for us is it allows us to watch who's accessing from the registry. We've got two ways. We can tell which registry is accessing, but then we can tell which individual is accessing. If we ever suspect that there is something going on, we immediately have one of our investigators go in and make sure that the access that they're gaining is for the purpose for which they had their licence.

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

**Mr. Elsalhy:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: since this government surrendered its responsibility to the private sector, is it now helpless in its ability to punish or revoke the licences of registry owners with a history of security infractions? What can we do to them?

**Mr. Lund:** Well, Mr. Speaker, we have forced the sale of registries. That has happened. We have cancelled the ability of individuals to have access to the registries. We take it extremely seriously any time that anyone breaches the security code. They all must have signed before they have that access. So if hon. members have any indication of any registry or any individual in a registry giving out information that they shouldn't have, please send it over because we really find this a very serious situation if somebody is breaching that contract.

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

**Mr. Elsalhy:** Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. This one is to the Solicitor General. Given that the RCMP has stated that they're willing to launch an investigation if properly funded, will you commit today to providing the funds necessary to conduct such a thorough investigation?

1:50

**Mr. Cernaiko:** Well, Mr. Speaker, the RCMP are properly funded, and if there's an allegation of criminal misconduct or a criminal offence within one of the registry offices, they would be called in to do an investigation.

The hon. Minister of Government Services explained all of the things that have been done over the last three years, if not over the last 10 years, regarding improving the system, ensuring that the system is safe, ensuring that the system is secure. If there are individuals that are found to have committed a criminal offence or released private information illegally, obviously they'll be dealt with according to the law.

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

### Health Care Reform

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Albertans who are puzzled by the strange omission of the so-called third way in health care from both Tuesday's taxpayer-funded PC infomercial and yesterday's throne speech should mark March 31 on their calendars. That's the day the Tory Party faithful vote on the Premier's leadership. In other words, Albertans are being kept in the dark about the government's secret plan to privatize health care because the Premier is worried about his leadership. My question is to the Premier. Why is this Premier keeping the government's plans for private, two-tier health care secret until after the upcoming vote on his leadership?

**Mr. Klein:** Mr. Speaker, the details will come when the legislation is introduced. At that time, the hon. leader of the third party will have ample time to debate the legislative changes unless, of course, he can come up with a better solution.

Now, I'm open to ideas, but I'll tell you what the problem is. Here's the original ask: Chinook health region, 19.8 per cent, that's \$1.9 billion; Palliser, 18.6 per cent, that's \$1.8 billion; Calgary, 17.3, that's \$1.7 billion; East Central, 28.7, that's \$2.8 billion. Without going through the whole list, the total is \$100.6 billion – \$100.6 billion this year alone – and they have no solutions other than to spend, spend, and spend more.

**Mr. Mason:** Mr. Speaker, they vote down our ideas which would save money.

Now, if the third way is so controversial that you can't even share it with the Tory delegates to your leadership review, Mr. Premier, what do you think normal Albertans are going to think about it?

**Mr. Klein:** I'll tell you what normal Albertans will think about it. Normal Albertans will think that \$100.6 billion is . . . [interjections] Well, they don't think it's much; \$100.6 billion – \$100.6 billion – and the NDs don't think it's much. Well, their sense of money is a lot different than mine, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Mason:** Mr. Speaker, if the Premier is so desperate to hang on to power for a couple more years, why doesn't he do the right thing and back away from his plans for private, two-tier medicine in this province until he gets a mandate from the people?

**Mr. Klein:** Mr. Speaker, I would challenge the media to ask the Official Opposition if they have any solutions or if the opposition thinks that \$100.6 billion is acceptable annually. If the answer is that, yes, they feel it's acceptable, then their assessment of the value of money, as I said before, is a lot different than mine.

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

### Persons with Developmental Disabilities

**Mr. VanderBurg:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've been hearing from some of my constituents in Whitecourt-St. Anne that the persons with developmental disabilities, or PDD, program is facing a funding crisis. This has caused some significant concerns amongst individuals with these disabilities and their families. My questions today are to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. Is the government planning to reduce needed funding to persons with developmental disabilities?

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

**Mrs. Fritz:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me be absolutely clear. There has not been and there will not be a reduction in funding for the persons with developmental disabilities program at all. In fact, over the past five years the funding for this important program has increased 70 per cent while the client base has increased 20 per cent. That means that this past year the budget has been nearly half a billion dollars, which is significant for 9,200 persons. I have to tell you this as well. The reason we're so committed to the program is that it's important that persons with developmental disabilities are able to participate effectively in our communities on an everyday basis. So it's significant funding, and it will not be reduced.

**Mr. VanderBurg:** Mr. Speaker, again to the same minister, and this will be the first question when I go home this weekend: how can the minister ensure that these people with disabilities are taken care of and get the support that they need?

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

**Mrs. Fritz:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. That is a good question. I know that a number of MLAs like this hon. member have received letters in this regard. It's important that you realize that we're not talking about funding just for one program and for those supports. What we are talking about is a range of supports for persons with developmental disabilities.

Mr. Speaker, you'll recall that we had in place this year a review for the AISH program. That program provides a range of supports, as well, for 90 per cent of our clients that receive funding through our persons with developmental disabilities program. So that's in addition to the nearly half a billion dollars, as I explained earlier, for the 9,200 clients. That means that we have the living allowance, which is increasing here in April to a thousand dollars per month for 90 per cent of our persons with development disabilities. We also have a comprehensive health benefits program. We have a brand new personal income support program that we've legislated. That's approximately \$360 per month.

This range of supports is because we are, as I said earlier, really committed to ensuring that persons with developmental disabilities can live and participate in our communities on an everyday basis.

**Mr. VanderBurg:** Mr. Speaker, again to the same minister: how will the minister and her department ensure that this funding is actually meeting the needs of the people it's intended for and actually getting to those people directly?

**Mrs. Fritz:** Well, Mr. Speaker, we all agree that it's important to ensure that this range of supports through these programs is available for persons with developmental disabilities. I can tell you, hon. member, that I as the minister responsible for this program will ensure that it's effective, that it's efficient, and that it's in place for persons with developmental disabilities on into the future. It is a significant amount of funding, but more importantly we have clients with great needs that need the budget.

Thank you.

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

### Health Care Reform

*(continued)*

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier has been

promising details about health reforms for years but gave no details in Tuesday's infomercial or in the throne speech. The Premier's way of health care seems to have been halted or perhaps just delayed. My questions are to the Premier. Was it the health minister's meeting with your federal cousins that halted the Premier's reforms?

**Mr. Klein:** Well, thank God we have some federal cousins that are at least honest. Remember Adscam. Mr. Speaker, I have to say that if I was part of a Liberal government and was involved in a scandal like Adscam, like the Liberals were, I would have to find a place far enough away in the world to hide, and if they found me, they would lynch me for sure. These people got away with it. Well, they really didn't get away with it. They were unelected, thank God.

Mr. Speaker, I apologize: the figure is only \$10 billion, not a hundred billion. Only \$10 billion. But they still don't have any solutions.

Relative to the question I'll have the hon. minister reply.

2:00

**Ms Evans:** Mr. Speaker, there was an opportunity to meet with the federal Minister of Health and to give a high-level overview of some of the plans in Alberta. It has not delayed anything or accelerated anything, merely given us an opportunity to have that exchange.

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

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you. Again to the Premier: is the delay because the Premier is being pressured by rural government members with concerns that these reforms will pull doctors away from their communities? Is that the delay?

**Mr. Klein:** Mr. Speaker, there is no delay. This takes time. We want to make sure that it's right. I'll be discussing later this afternoon with the minister a public consultation process. That has yet to take place, and we want to make sure that it is right. Once again I would ask – and I would ask sincerely – that if the Liberals or the NDs have any solutions to bring these costs under control, please send them over. The hon. leader chirps and chips, but he doesn't have any solutions. I have yet to see anything on paper. Yes, he's good to stand on the steps of the Legislature and lead the Raging Grannies and the Friends of Medicare and all the other supporters in chants and so on, but he has no solutions. He is mindless.

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

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you. The Premier already has the Liberal document called *Toward a Healthy Future*, so he can look in there for suggestions.

My final question to the Premier: is the government delaying implementation of the Premier's way or just delaying the announcement until after March 31?

**Mr. Klein:** Neither, Mr. Speaker. And "the way": I'd like to see that. I don't recall ever receiving a copy. Maybe I have a copy. I want to see some specific solutions that are going to achieve two things: one, increase access, and number two, bring costs in line with the rate of inflation.

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

### Summer Temporary Employment Program

**Mr. Danyluk:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My first question is to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. The summer temporary employment program has been implemented for over 30 years and has provided Alberta's youth valuable hands-on experience and opportunities that can be directly applied to their future education and training. I would like to know if the program is still in place and if Albertans are benefiting from it.

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

**Mr. Cardinal:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That's a very good question. Of course, the summer temporary employment program, or the STEP program, is a very important program that helps workers and employers. This year more than 3,000 students and individual youth will be able to participate in the program, and they will learn skills from the program.

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

**Mr. Danyluk:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is also to the same minister. As part of the STEP program the government offsets some of the costs associated with the workers' wages. Last year Alberta's minimum wage increased. Was this increase taken into account in this year's STEP program?

**Mr. Cardinal:** Yes, Mr. Speaker, definitely. What we pay under STEP is \$6.05 an hour, but we expect the employers, of course, to pay the minimum wage. In most cases you will find that they top up the wages considerably higher.

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

**Mr. Danyluk:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My last supplemental question is also for the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. I know that there will be businesses and community and nonprofit organizations like historical sites in my constituency that will be interested in taking part in the program. How do they apply, and what is the deadline for the STEP applications?

**Mr. Cardinal:** Mr. Speaker, any organization, including historical organizations, interested in STEP funding may apply. The deadline is February 28, and the phone number is 780-422-5082. The STEP program runs from April 24 to September 1.

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

### Adoption Quotas

**Mrs. Mather:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In January of this year it was reported that an internal government report produced by Children's Services detailed some very disturbing policies regarding financial penalties and adoption quotas. In a February 7, 2006, letter the hon. Minister of Children's Services states that she does not condone the use of a quota system; however, her department does set performance measures to achieve its business goals including increasing the number of adoptions in the province. My questions are for the Minister of Children's Services. Does your ministry now or has it in the past financially rewarded or penalized child welfare workers for either meeting or falling short of their performance measures?

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

**Mrs. Forsyth:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me first say that we're deeply committed in this government to finding permanent homes for children that are in our care. I don't believe for a minute that having adoption quotas in our business plan is out of line. We want all our workers in the field to understand the importance that we put on adoptions in this province. We want to make sure that our children are taken care of and that they find a good, stable home.

**Mrs. Mather:** To the same minister: what steps has the minister taken in investigating the use of financial penalties for child welfare workers who do not meet a specific quota?

**Mrs. Forsyth:** Mr. Speaker, I think we have to put this in perspective. First of all, what the hon. member is talking about is a bonus system that is given to the CEOs within the region. That's to make sure that they match the goals that we set out for them. At no time under my ministry has anyone ever been penalized.

**Mrs. Mather:** To the same minister: will the minister reassure child welfare workers today that they will not face repercussions for speaking out publicly and reporting financial penalties imposed by Children's Services?

**Mrs. Forsyth:** Mr. Speaker, let's be clear here. First of all, no child care worker in this province is penalized for not meeting their quotas. What I will say is that the caseworkers in this province do a wonderful job. We appreciate everything that they do. I'm committed as the minister to continue to dialogue with them. Last summer I spent the entire summer travelling this province talking individually to child care workers. I met with them, listened to some of their concerns. They're committed to adoptions. They're committed to our aboriginal children in this province, to make sure that they find homes for these people. They do a wonderful job, and at no time are they ever penalized.

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

### Edmonton Catholic School Board Deficit

**Mr. Lukaszuk:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently it was discovered through an external audit that the Edmonton Catholic school board had accumulated a nearly \$10 million deficit and, to make matters worse, was not precisely aware how this deficit was generated. Subsequently the board voted against an independent forensic audit, leaving many questions unanswered. To the Minister of Education: how is it possible that a school board can generate a nearly \$10 million deficit without the trustees being aware of it?

**Mr. Zwodzesky:** Mr. Speaker, this is a very unfortunate circumstance. Obviously, \$10 million is a very large amount of money for any school board to try and handle. The issue, I think, is that the School Act requires an external auditor to be appointed to every school jurisdiction, and that particular auditor's responsibilities would include management letters at the end of an audit term. As soon as those deficiencies were spotted, I'm assuming that they were brought forward to the trustees, specifically to the board chair, who in turn called me about it as soon as she knew about it. We sat down, and we had a meeting about it. They've now sent me a letter outlining what they're going to do about it, and we'll take it from there. The fact is, though, that I remain concerned that we don't

have any impact on the classroom. We're just reviewing those numbers and statistics right now. In terms of the exact process of how they landed there, that will be I'm sure explained further as the days and months roll along.

2:10

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

**Mr. Lukaszuk:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My further supplemental to the same minister: how is it possible that the finance director was only reprimanded for this colossal loss and still remains in charge of the Edmonton Catholic school board's books?

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Mr. Speaker, obviously staffing decisions are at the discretion of the local school board. We don't hire staff for these school jurisdictions. They do that themselves. I think they do it to the best of their abilities. In this particular case obviously there were some cost overruns. They have already indicated publicly and to me privately that there will be some reprimands. Perhaps they've already instituted some of those reprimands. In the end the situation needs to be corrected and it also needs to not repeat itself. I'm satisfied so far that they've taken some steps in that direction, and they will perhaps be taking even more stringent steps in the very near future.

**Mr. Lukaszuk:** Lastly, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: how is it possible that the school board will recover \$10 million without really negatively affecting the students' learning?

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** That, indeed, is the central concern, I think, for the parents, obviously for the students, for the teachers, for the trustees, and for the administrators alike. The fact is that some cost overruns unfortunately occurred on the capital infrastructure side. Alberta Education is expected to inherit that aspect of the portfolio soon, and we'll be looking at tightening up some of the controls where possible. I think there were other cost overruns with respect to not having in place a proper project-based accounting system, and that, too, is being rectified. In fact, I understand that they have engaged or will soon be engaging a supplementary auditor to help to correct the difficulties they have and to ensure that others don't occur.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

### Learning Commission Recommendations

**Mr. Flaherty:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Learning Commission was a major public review of the Alberta education system. It wrapped up in 2003, but Alberta's children are still waiting while this government and minister continue to consult and study the issues to death. Twenty-one accepted recommendations have involved nothing more than studying, and yesterday: more studies and more consultations. My question to the Minister of Education: how long will Albertans wait for action on key promises like fundraising, school fees, and access to diagnostic learning services for children?

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Mr. Speaker, I'm so grateful to have this question because the Alberta Commission on Learning actually put out 95 recommendations, a huge number of recommendations that covered tip to stern, so to speak, of the education system in this province. We have the best education system anywhere in Canada. Our goal is to make it one of the best in the entire world, and we're getting there very, very quickly.

I should just point out, Mr. Speaker, that yes, there are a few recommendations in the Learning Commission that still require some additional discussion and study. We have had a lot. It's been very open and public and transparent and all of that. In the interim let's not forget that we have added 551 million – half a billion – brand new dollars in support of the Learning Commission recommendations that were accepted. With your permission I'd like to read all 42 pages if I could. Maybe I could seek unanimous consent of the House to read all of them.

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

**Mr. Flaherty:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: as collective agreements expire this year, how long will the ATA and the school boards wait before knowing how to start negotiating their collective agreements?

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Mr. Speaker, I think the member is referring to recommendation 81 (a) and (c), wherein it was recommended that the School Boards Association have in place a bargaining model, a province-wide bargaining model akin to what we see with the Alberta Teachers' Association. Now, that is one of the most contentious issues that we have on the plate before us. As the hon. member would know, we allowed for the fullest amount of presentation possible, and the last group just came in in the middle of December. We've got their information now, and it's been rolled into the mix. We're studying that stuff as well. This is one where the school boards have voted 59 per cent in favour of a particular model. Quite clearly, 41 per cent were not in favour. It takes a little bit of fine figure skating to get through some of these issues, and this is one of them.

**Mr. Flaherty:** Don't trip.

Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: when will this government stop driving school boards into millions of dollars' difficulty and fund all-day kindergarten? Immediately, please?

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Mr. Speaker, junior kindergarten or the possibility of it and the possibility of having full-day, mandatory kindergarten are two additional recommendations of the Learning Commission. I think what I'd like to do to answer the hon. member's question is simply say this: 95 per cent of young Albertans who are five years of age and therefore eligible for kindergarten enrolment are already enrolled in a kindergarten program.

We spend about \$100 million or \$110 million per year helping school boards provide those important programs, and you know what, Mr. Speaker? They're working, and they're so largely subscribed to because there is flexibility for the local school board to provide it in a manner at a time and a location that suits the local area. Quite frankly, many school boards like that. However, this issue, too, I'll be addressing further this year.

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

### Registry System Security (continued)

**Dr. Pannu:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For all this government knows, Tony Soprano, John Gotti, and Al Capone may be driving around North America with fake Alberta drivers' licences from privatized registries. Unnamed government and law enforcement officials are beyond frustrated and are beginning to make public

information about bribery, forgery, and gangland connections. It's a damning indictment of the government's privatization policy. My question is to the Minister of Government Services. Given that there is evidence of security breaches and widespread fraud and abuse of Alberta drivers' licences by criminal gangs, why won't the minister admit that registries' privatization has been an abysmal failure?

**Mr. Lund:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I would advise the hon. member to read *Hansard*, but as far as the people that he indicated that were using false drivers' licences, I hope they're not because I thought there were some of those folks that were looking at the grass from the wrong side now. But I imagine that our drivers' licences would be accepted in heaven. They are very superior.

Mr. Speaker, it's unfortunate that the hon. member doesn't check a little more closely about what was printed because, in fact, what was printed was incidents that happened some time back, and as I outlined to the Liberal opposition, we have done many things to make sure that they are secure.

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

**Dr. Pannu:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the reports of security breaches are linked to organized crime, will the minister share with this House what he knows about gang involvement in compromising Albertans' private information held and collected by private registries?

**Mr. Lund:** Mr. Speaker, whenever we have any report or any reason to suspect that there may be information being let out or people seeking this information that is being given into hands that it shouldn't be, we do send in inspectors, and we're very, very careful to make sure that private information is not getting into the wrong hands. We take this very, very seriously, and that's why we have set up so many inspectors, eight of them in Calgary, seven of them in Edmonton, investigators that can go quickly, unannounced to these facilities. We have the mechanism now in place so that we can check who it is that's asking for that information and then be able to follow up to make sure that that information is used only for the purposes for which it was granted.

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

**Dr. Pannu:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question to the minister: given that Albertans have every right to know how and to what extent organized crime has infiltrated privatized registries, why hasn't the minister turned the whole sorry mess over to the RCMP for a proper criminal investigation?

2:20

**Mr. Lund:** Well, Mr. Speaker, the fact is – and the Solicitor General clearly commented in his answer – that any time we suspect, even just suspect, that there is organized crime involvement, we turn it over to the police authorities. That's one of the things we do right away. Our investigators will have a primary look at it, and then if there's any thought that it might be connected with a gang, it's turned over to the local police authorities.

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

#### Softwood Lumber Trade Dispute

**Mr. Strang:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Constituents of

West Yellowhead along with other Albertans continue to look forward to a resolution of the long-standing Canada/U.S. softwood lumber dispute. Recently some U.S. Senators have called for negotiations to resume between the United States and Canada to reach a settlement. My first question is to the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations. Are there any talks planned to resolve the softwood lumber dispute?

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

**Mr. Stelmach:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are meeting with federal counterparts, various ministers, and potentially structuring meetings with the Americans on the lumber dispute. We're just taking some time for the federal government to put people in place that will not only do the negotiating, but there's now, of course, a change in ambassadorship, so those things are going to take a few more weeks.

I'd just like to inform the House about two things. One is that Alberta will not favour any sort of a settlement at any cost, and secondly, we will have a thorough consultation with all industry before we sign any agreement.

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

**Mr. Strang:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary question is also to the same minister. Is there any reason for hope on this issue, especially with the new federal government and the new Canadian ambassador to the United States in place now?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, there is. Although the previous ambassador, Ambassador McKenna, moved the file considerably – he was a great supporter of finding a quick resolution to this 20-year issue that's been lingering – we now have a new ambassador, Ambassador Wilson, who was part of the negotiating team on the original free trade agreement. That will bring hope to finding a resolution. Also, the Americans, of course, are moving legislation on the Byrd amendment. So things are lining up positively, and we do have great hope that this will finally resolve the issue.

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

**Mr. Strang:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplementary question is to the same minister. Is trade retaliation against the United States the answer to solving this ongoing dispute?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Our position is that we don't support any trade retaliation. If we ever use energy, for instance, that'll be tremendously harmful to our economy, and as the Premier has said many times, 99 per cent of our trade occurs very quietly day in and day out without any problems. This is one issue that, if we start the trade war, potentially will hurt Alberta's interests in the long run. So, no, we don't support any trade retaliation.

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

#### Education Funding

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Despite the fact that Calgary and its surrounding districts are responsible for educating almost a third of Alberta students, we continue to be abandoned by this government. The combined school infrastructure debt of Calgary public and separate has grown to a half billion dollars with no

concrete relief in sight for Calgary as of yesterday's throne speech. My questions are all to the Minister of Education, who last year was granted greater control of the school infrastructure budget. Given that your government accepted the reduced class size recommendations of the Learning Commission, why are Varsity Acres' kindergarten children being educated in a windowless copy room while the staff room was converted into another makeshift classroom?

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Mr. Speaker, I'm not aware of that particular circumstance, but if the member wishes to send me over some details, I wouldn't mind having a look at it. I'm assuming that he's already brought the case to the attention of the school board responsible.

I should just add this, Mr. Speaker. We have a number of very positive and good-news stories coming into and out of Calgary. For example, we know that Centennial high school in Calgary, that was recently opened, was one of seven – one of seven – new Calgary schools scheduled for '04-05, and another four are open or are scheduled to be opened in the current school year. These 11 new projects will provide enough space to accommodate 5,275 new students for the Calgary public board and 2,000 additional student spaces for the Calgary Catholic district. So as monies come available, we are addressing these circumstances.

Secondly, we're also providing where we can and on the basis of health and safety concerns additional brand new, state-of-the-art, steel-framed modulars to help accommodate those populations that are fluctuating in terms of students. So there's quite a bit of good news happening.

I'd like to comment on the \$207 million that I announced last September. I'd like to read that entire list at some point into *Hansard*, Mr. Speaker, so the people in Alberta know how much we are investing as monies come available for new school infrastructure projects.

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

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question, of course, to the Minister of Education: if your government is not willing to repair older schools and build enough new ones to meet Calgary and district's growing population, why won't you at least provide suitable portable relief? The ones that you are personally sending now to the Calgary district don't fit.

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Mr. Speaker, we're providing about \$4.7 billion this year alone through the Department of Education, and some of that, obviously, is also with Infrastructure. Now, once the infrastructure portfolio, all three parts, comes over into Education's domain, I will be able to respond in even greater detail.

However, let me just say, Mr. Speaker, that we spend hundreds of millions of dollars every year on one form of infrastructure or another to help improve our schools to make sure that they are safe, to make sure that they are affordable and accessible and that our students are being provided with the best educational opportunities possible. We do that consistently right throughout the province, including the wonderful city of Calgary.

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

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Why does this government continue to undermine public education by subsidizing private schools to the tune of 60 per cent of their public counterparts' per pupil grants? Is this your third way for education?

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Mr. Speaker, one of the incredible success stories in Alberta is the fact that we allow choice. We allow and we encourage the most choice in kindergarten to grade 12 programming in the country. We have public schools, we have public Catholic schools, we have francophone schools, we have charter schools, we have virtual schools, and we even have private schools. They're all part of the mix that makes this the great province that it is, and the parents appreciate having that choice. The fact that we're able to provide only 60 per cent of the instructional component, none out of the infrastructure capital side, for helping out our private schools is yet another one of our major accolades, and the students in those schools are doing extremely well.

### Vignettes from the Assembly's History

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, as you're aware, in 2006 we will be celebrating the 100th anniversary of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. For the duration of the Second Session of the 26th Legislature at this point in the agenda I will be providing you on a daily basis a historical vignette in commemoration of this anniversary. These vignettes may provide historical data, quotations, or remarks made by a variety of members and brief descriptions about them.

Alberta's first election was held on November 9, 1905, and our 26th election was held on November 22, 2004. Throughout our 100-year history in our democracy in Alberta a total of only 769 different members have been elected in the 26 elections. In terms of service 286 members served one term, 187 members served two terms, 140 members served three terms, 78 members served four terms, 40 members served five terms, 19 members served six terms, eight members served seven terms, six members served eight terms, four members served nine terms, and one member served 10 terms. The average length of service in this Assembly has been 2.4 terms.

In terms of the longest serving MLAs in the history of the province of Alberta the longest serving member was Gordon E. Taylor, who served the 9th to the 18th Legislatures. He was elected for the first time in 1940 for the original constituency of Drumheller and served for 38 years and 10 months.

2:30

The second longest serving member was elected in the 1935 provincial election. Alfred J. Hooke, representing the constituency of Red Deer, served from the Eighth to the 16th Legislatures and served for 35 years and one month.

Ernest C. Manning was the third longest serving member. Elected in the 1935 election out of the city of Calgary, he served from the Eighth to the 16th Legislatures and served for 33 years and three months.

Floyd M. Baker, elected in 1935, representing the constituency of Clover Bar, served from the Eighth to the 15th Legislatures for a total of 31 years and seven months.

In 1971 Peter Trynchy was elected in the constituency of Whitecourt, served from the 17th to the 24th Legislatures. He served for 29 years and five months.

Those are the five longest serving members in the history of the province of Alberta.

The sixth longest serving member was William Tomy. Elected in 1935 in the constituency of Whitford, he served from the Eighth to the 11th Legislatures and then from the 14th to the 16th, for 28 years and 11 months.

The next longest serving member, elected in 1963, was Ray Speaker, who served from the 15th to the 22nd Legislatures for the constituency of Little Bow for 28 years and six months.



R.E. Ainsley was elected in 1935, served from the Eighth to the 14th Legislatures for the constituency of Leduc for 27 years and eight months.

In 1935 Peter Dawson was elected in the constituency of Little Bow, served from the Eighth to the 14th Legislatures, for 27 years and seven months. He served for 26 years as the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of the province of Alberta.

Still in the race but moving fast is the current MLA for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock, who was elected in 1979, from the 19th Legislature to the present, has now served 26 years and four months for the constituencies of Barrhead and others but at the conclusion of this term will just – whoa – go all the way up.

Thank you.

**An Hon. Member:** It'll be another 10 years before they paint your portrait.

**The Speaker:** Well, that's true.

head:

### Members' Statements

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

#### Alberta Winter Games

**Mr. Strang:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I stand before you this afternoon, Alberta's best young athletes are gathering in the communities of West Yellowhead for the 2006 Winter Games. Tonight our Premier will open the games at the Gordon Moore park in Hinton. Tomorrow the athletes take centre stage as the competition begins. Twenty-five hundred athletes and officials will take part, representing eight zones with pride and enthusiasm.

The Alberta Games are the essence of sports in our province. They bring together the passion of youth, the power of volunteerism, and the pride of the community for a special day every two years.

For some athletes the Alberta Games may be the starting point for their successful career in sport. For many others it will give them the skills and the experience that will help them throughout their lives.

Hosting the games speaks to the spirit and the pride of Alberta communities. This year it's the people of Edson, Hinton, Jasper, and Yellowhead county who are putting on the show. It takes almost as many volunteers as athletes to make this event successful. From the games' board of directors, committees, and office staff through to the volunteers driving the buses, preparing the special meals, and cleaning the venues – these are the people who deserve our thanks for their efforts.

Mr. Speaker, I'd ask the members of the House to join me in wishing everyone involved in the 2006 Winter Games all the best for a successful event.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Foothills-Rocky View.

#### Supreme Court Nomination Process

**Dr. Morton:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to congratulate the new Prime Minister of Canada, the Rt. Hon. Stephen Harper, on his historic victory in the January 23 federal election. For only the third time in the history of Canada we have a Prime Minister from Alberta, something that, I am sure, pleases everybody in this Chamber. Almost everybody.

Mr. Speaker, I'm also pleased to see that Prime Minister Harper is already fulfilling his campaign promises to bring much-needed

democratic reform and accountability to Ottawa. Today the Prime Minister announced his nomination of Justice Marshall Rothstein from Manitoba to fill the current vacancy on the Supreme Court of Canada. On Monday, for the first time in the history of our country, a nominee for the Supreme Court will appear before a public confirmation hearing and answer questions posed by an all-party committee of parliamentarians. This is a most welcome constitutional reform. It will bring more openness, more transparency, and more accountability to the process of government.

Mr. Speaker, since the adoption of the Charter of Rights in 1982 the justices of the Supreme Court of Canada have become some of the most politically influential decision-makers in our country. The people of Canada have a right to know something about these judges before they are appointed because once they are appointed, they wield this power until the age of 75 and mandatory retirement.

Monday's public confirmation hearings will create a historic precedent for democratic reform and strengthen our system of checks and balances. So I say congratulations, Prime Minister Harper.

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

#### Universal Health Care

**Mrs. Jablonski:** Thank you. Mr. Speaker, although Premier Tommy Douglas of Saskatchewan is called the father of medicare, the true roots of medicare were planted and nurtured in the province of Alberta. It was the government of Alberta that designed the first health care plan in Canada to cover all citizens, and the government protected this plan in the 1935 and 1942 Alberta state health insurance acts.

The federal government proposals that started all of Canada on the road to universal health care in 1945 were the same proposals from the Alberta Hoadley commission of 1932-33 that had already been adopted by Alberta. Due to the absence of comprehensive, researched history of medicine in Alberta before 1947, credit for being the first to establish universal health care was not documented until just recently by Dr. Robert Lampard. An excerpt from his book *Profiles and Perspectives from Alberta's Medical History*, which documents the roots of medicare in Alberta, is published in the February 2006 volume of *The Alberta Doctors' Digest*.

Not only was the government of Alberta the first to establish medicare in Canada; it's also recognized in this history book as the greatest defender of medicare. Premier Manning helped save medicare when he led an appeal to reduce the costs of the 1967 Pearson plan by reducing its contemplated coverage. Alberta's present Premier helped save medicare by finding a way to stretch medicare dollars in 1993.

With health care costs rapidly escalating throughout the world, it is critically important that we find a way to save many of the health care benefits that we enjoy. It would be weak and foolish to pretend that we can save health care without making changes. It is prudent to prevent a collapse of a system by restructuring it. There needs to be a new way to ensure universal health care.

Alberta designed the first health care plan to cover all citizens. Alberta will design a plan that will protect our health care system and make it stronger for future generations.

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

#### Support for Olympic Athletes

**Mr. Bonko:** Thanks, Mr. Speaker. As the Olympic Games in Turin, Italy, continue, we as Canadians, more importantly Albertans, have

much to be proud of. These men and women have put their lives and careers on hold in the pursuit of excellence in the form of bronze, silver, and gold.

Rural areas such as Vermilion, Spruce Grove, Canmore, and Eckville and the cities of Edmonton and Calgary have new heroes. There have been a total of 19 medals to date, and a great number of these belong to Albertans. This speaks volumes to the quality of the people this province has within its boundaries. This speaks to the determination that lies deep within each athlete.

As a province we should be supporting these athletes through funding. This government has growing surpluses larger than before. Alberta once had a system that produced many great athletes and many great Canadians. It's time that we became that province once again. We have an opportunity before us in the 2008 Summer Games and the 2010 Winter Olympics in Canada to allow Alberta to really stand out, not for oil and gas revenues but for its people, the true Alberta wealth.

2:40

Currently athletes receive funding from the corporate community, the federal government, and nongovernment agencies and families. Now is the time for leadership from this government to support our athletes and show that Alberta remains committed to providing superior quality of life that is inclusive and active, further supporting a healthy Alberta leading by example.

Thank you.

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

#### Child Care Services

**Mrs. Mather:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to take this opportunity to speak about our province's most valuable resource: our children. As we are all aware, the changing of the federal government has created a widespread sense of uncertainty within the child care sector not only in Alberta but across Canada.

Federal MP Olivia Chow has announced that she plans on bringing forward a bill that would reaffirm the national child care agreement enacted by the former federal government. The implications of cancelling this agreement are still uncertain in Alberta, leaving families and child care workers alike in a state of uncertainty. Alberta relied in large part upon the funding provided by the previous federal government to enact its five-point plan, a positive step in ensuring that our children receive quality care and that child care workers receive sufficient supports and respect.

I urge the members of this Assembly to join in recognition of the importance of maintaining and building upon a provincial child care program that is healthy, fully supported, and respected. Alberta families need to know that regardless of who is in Ottawa, their children will have access to quality care. Child care workers need to know that their work is highly valued and that the recent commitments of this provincial government will not be withdrawn or reduced in light of the federal election results.

I'm expressing my support for families in the child care sector in Alberta by asking this provincial government to immediately commit to following through on its responsibilities to the child care sector through whatever means necessary. In the wealthiest province in Canada we can all agree that our most valuable resource is our children. We cannot allow changes in Ottawa to undermine our commitments to provide respectable, quality care for the next generation of Albertans.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

#### Public Health Care

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The results of the federal election have shown that Albertans will not tolerate dishonesty in government. This is bad news for the Premier. During the election the Premier refused to speak honestly to Albertans about health care. He openly declared that he had no plan for private health care, and he claimed that he was going to consult with Albertans prior to moving towards two-tier health care. Both claims have proven false. The result is that this government has no mandate for its plan for private, two-tier health care.

The deception continues, Mr. Speaker. Albertans won't know the details of the health privatization plan until after two important events: the PC Party leadership review on March 31 and a taxpayer-funded propaganda campaign to sell private health care to Albertans. If health care privatization is making Tory delegates so nervous and the government backbenchers so skittish, one can only imagine the reaction of normal Albertans once they finally see the plan. That's why the Premier is waiting for a taxpayer-funded, multimillion-dollar propaganda campaign to sell Albertans on the virtues of waiting longer, paying more, and padding profits for health care corporations.

The Premier is hiding his health privatization plans from Albertans because of his own personal, political interests. When politicians refuse to be honest, it's the people who lose. While the Premier clings to power and the government panders to the private health care lobby, Albertans are demanding that the government improve the public health care system, control costs by getting a handle on drug costs, and invest in prevention and promotion.

Real solutions for improving public health care, solutions championed by the NDP opposition, are being ignored in favour of deception and self-interest calculations. Mr. Speaker, Albertans will not stand for it.

#### head: Presenting Petitions

**The Speaker:** The hon. leader of the third party on a petition.

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the first of what I know will be many petitions in support of health care during this session. This one urges the government of Alberta to "eliminate private clinics and private delivery in the health care system, and develop a comprehensive plan to strengthen and extend Medicare." It contains 238 signatures.

#### head: Notices of Motions

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

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

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

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview on a Standing Order 30 notification.

**Mr. Martin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to propose the following motion.

Be it resolved that this Assembly adjourn the ordinary business of the Assembly to discuss a matter of urgent public importance: namely, the ongoing reduction in funding and supports provided to individuals and families through the Persons with Developmental Disabilities Board.

**The Speaker:** The hon. leader of the third party on a Standing Order 15 submission.

**Mr. Mason:** Mr. Speaker, I'd propose the following motion.

Be it resolved that the Assembly consider the Premier's release of the 2006 Speech from the Throne to members of the media and the Leader of the Official Opposition prior to Members of the Legislative Assembly a contempt of the Assembly and a breach of the Assembly's privilege.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, at the conclusion the chair will deal with the privilege statement first, before we proceed to the Standing Order 30 application.

head: **Introduction of Bills**

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

**Bill 2  
Drug-endangered Children Act**

**Mrs. Forsyth:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being the Drug-endangered Children Act.

This bill will make it clear that children exposed to serious drug activities such as manufacturing and trafficking are victims of abuse and need protection. Protecting children is becoming increasingly complex, and we need this legislation to help us keep ahead of this emerging social issue.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 2 read a first time]

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

**Bill 3  
Protection Against Family Violence  
Amendment Act, 2006**

**Mrs. Jablonski:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd also like to thank the hon. Minister of Children's Services for asking me to lead this bill through the Legislature.

It's my pleasure to introduce and move first reading of the Protection Against Family Violence Amendment Act.

The proposed amendments to this important legislation will further protect victims of family violence by addressing abusive and threatening behaviours such as stalking. It will also offer protection to more family members to ensure that vulnerable people like seniors or those with disabilities don't fall prey to family violence.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** For the record that is Bill 3, and added to the conclusion of the name of the bill was 2006.

[Motion carried; Bill 3 read a first time]

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

**Mr. Zwodzesky:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that Bill 3, the Protection Against Family Violence Amendment Act, 2006, sponsored by the hon. Member for Red Deer-North, be placed on the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

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

**Bill 4  
Daylight Saving Time Amendment Act, 2006**

**Mr. Stevens:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 4, the Daylight Saving Time Amendment Act, 2006.

In August 2005 the government of the United States passed a law extending daylight saving time by four weeks. Following that decision the Alberta government looked into the pros and cons of changing daylight saving time in our own province. The decision to introduce this legislation came after consultation with all of the ministries and the relevant stakeholders. The decision among the majority of stakeholders was to synchronize with our trading partners. This bill proposes to extend daylight saving time in Alberta, beginning with the second Sunday in March and ending the first Sunday in November, commencing in 2007.

[Motion carried; Bill 4 read a first time]

2:50

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

**Bill 5  
Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2006**

**Mr. Stevens:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 5, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2006.

This bill deals with minor amendments in three pieces of justice legislation: the Civil Enforcement Act, the judicature amendment act, and the Mechanical Recording of Evidence Act.

Amendments to the Civil Enforcement Act will further refine and clarify the process for seizing property that is already under seizure so that all types of creditors can use the same process under that act.

Amendments to the judicature amendment act, originally introduced in 2004, will refine and clarify original amendments that allow structured settlements in injury and death cases so that payments can be made in instalments rather than in a lump sum.

Amendments to the Mechanical Recording of Evidence Act reflect developments resulting from the introduction of digital recording in courtrooms in the year 2000. The changes will update the definition of court reporter, allow more flexibility in how records of court proceedings are certified, and clarify how records of court proceedings are stored and maintained.

[Motion carried; Bill 5 read a first time]

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

**Bill 6  
Maintenance Enforcement Amendment Act, 2006**

**Mr. Stevens:** Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 6, the Maintenance Enforcement Amendment Act, 2006.

[Motion carried; Bill 6 read a first time]

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

**Bill 7****Motor Vehicle Accident Claims Amendment Act, 2006**

**Mr. Stevens:** Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 7, the Motor Vehicle Accident Claims Amendment Act, 2006.

I'll have more to say on this later.

[Motion carried; Bill 7 read a first time]

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

**Bill 8****Trustee Amendment Act, 2006**

**Mr. Stevens:** Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 8, the Trustee Amendment Act, 2006.

In 2001 we amended the Trustee Act to introduce the prudent investor rule, allowing trustees to diversify investments to control risk and improve financial returns. At that time, the old rules governing trustee investments, referred to as the legal list, were retained for transitional purposes in a schedule to the Trustee Act. The bill eliminates the legal list from the Trustee Act altogether.

[Motion carried; Bill 8 read a first time]

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

**Bill 9****Income and Employment Supports Amendment Act, 2006**

**Mr. Cardinal:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, the carrier of Bill 9, I request leave to introduce Bill 9, the Income and Employment Supports Amendment Act, 2006.

[Motion carried; Bill 9 read a first time]

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

**Bill 10****Engineering, Geological and Geophysical Professions Amendment Act, 2006**

**Mr. Danyluk:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased to request leave to introduce Bill 10, the Engineering, Geological and Geophysical Professions Amendment Act, 2006.

Mr. Speaker, this act will help clarify and strengthen the engineering profession by allowing registered professional technologists to sit on the council of the Association of Professional Engineers, Geologists and Geophysicists of Alberta, APEGGA, and vote on new amendments, regulations, and bylaws.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 10 read a first time]

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

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that Bill 10, the Engineering, Geological and Geophysical Professions Amendment Act, 2006, sponsored by the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul, be placed on the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

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

**Bill 11****Architects Amendment Act, 2006**

**Ms DeLong:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased today to request leave to introduce Bill 11, the Architects Amendment Act, 2006.

Mr. Speaker, this act will help to clarify and strengthen the architect profession by allowing the Alberta Association of Architects to clarify its governance of licensed interior designers and enforce the requirement for compulsory continuing competence in their profession.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 11 read a first time]

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

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that Bill 11, the Architects Amendment Act, 2006, as introduced by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Government Services.

**Bill 12****Land Titles Amendment Act, 2006**

**Mr. Lund:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to introduce a bill being Bill 12, Land Titles Amendment Act, 2006.

Mr. Speaker, this bill will implement many of the recommendations of the mortgage fraud committee and, hopefully, make it much more difficult for people who register titles under a mortgage fraud.

[Motion carried; Bill 12 read a first time]

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

**Bill 13****Real Estate Amendment Act, 2006**

**Mr. Strang:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to introduce Bill 13, the Real Estate Amendment Act, 2006.

This bill will give tools to the Real Estate Association to help combat mortgage fraud.

Thank you very much.

[Motion carried; Bill 13 read a first time]

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

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that Bill 13, the Real Estate Amendment Act, 2006, as presented by the hon. Member for West Yellowhead, be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

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

**Bill 14****Health Professions Statutes Amendment Act, 2006**

**Mr. Amery:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat I request leave to introduce Bill 14, the Health Professions Statutes Amendment Act, 2006.

Mr. Speaker, these minor amendments will strengthen the act and respond to issues raised by individual callers and by the federation of regulated health professions.

I move first reading of Bill 14. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 14 read a first time]

3:00

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

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that Bill 14, the Health Professions Statutes Amendment Act, 2006, sponsored by the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

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

**Bill 15****International Interests in  
Mobile Aircraft Equipment Act**

**Mr. Stelmach:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce Bill 15, the International Interests in Mobile Aircraft Equipment Act.

This act would implement provisions of agreements signed by Canada that create an international registry for aircraft engines and airframes. Because registry information is a provincial responsibility, provincial implementing legislation is needed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 15 read a first time]

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

**Bill 16****Peace Officer Act**

**Mr. Johnston:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 16, the Peace Officer Act.

This bill will ensure better communication, co-operation, and collaboration between employers of peace officers and police services across the province, which will result in a higher level of law enforcement services in Alberta. It will also clarify the role, responsibility, and accountability of peace officers and strengthen provincial standards such as training, use of force, and qualifications.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 16 read a first time]

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

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that Bill 16, the Peace Officer Act, as presented by the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays, be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

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

**Bill 17****Libraries Amendment Act, 2006**

**Mr. Mar:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Sir, I beg leave to introduce Bill 17, the Libraries Amendment Act, 2006.

This act will provide library boards and municipalities greater flexibility to ensure that Albertans receive efficient and consistent library service. The amendments also clarify financial reporting requirements and provide for a mechanism when a municipality dissolves or amalgamates.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 17 read a first time]

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

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Regarding Bill 201, which comes up next, and following discussions that I understand took place amongst members of all sides of the House, I would seek unanimous consent of the Assembly to waive the ordinary requirements of notice, that being pursuant to Standing Order 38(1)(d), which would allow for first reading of the human tissue gift act.

[Unanimous consent granted]

**Bill 201****Human Tissue Gift (Notification Procedure)  
Amendment Act, 2006**

**Mr. Liepert:** Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce a bill being the Human Tissue Gift (Notification Procedure) Amendment Act, 2006.

This bill is designed to increase the number of Albertans who consent to tissue and organ donation to help save or improve the lives of those requiring transplants.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 201 read a first time]

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

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Similarly, with respect to upcoming Bill 202 and following discussions that I believe did take place amongst all sides of the House, I would seek the unanimous consent of the Assembly to waive the ordinary requirements of notice as required otherwise under Standing Order 38(1)(d) to allow for first reading of the Environmental Protection and Enhancement (Methamphetamine) Amendment Act, 2006.

[Unanimous consent granted]

**The Speaker:** That being the case, I'll call on the hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

**Bill 202****Environmental Protection and Enhancement  
(Methamphetamine) Amendment Act, 2006**

**Mr. Strang:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 202, Environmental Protection and Enhancement (Methamphetamine) Amendment Act, 2006.

Basically what this act is to do is to give some more tools in the

tool case for the hon. Minister of Environment to make sure that when crystal meth is made, the disposal of this is done in a proper way or that the persons that are doing this are paying penalties to clean up our environment so that we have the best environment in Canada.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 202 read a first time]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

**Mr. Mason:** Hi, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling a package of documents prepared by the Friends of Medicare as part of their keep medicare public campaign. The documents were released in recent weeks and are a clear signal that Albertans are ready and willing to fight for their cherished public health care system.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Eggen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table a paper written by Herb Emery and Kevin Gerrits entitled The Demand for Private Health Care Insurance in Alberta. Herb Emery is a senior fellow at the Fraser Institute, and the paper argues that for private insurance to be profitable, there must be a superior private system and an inferior public one.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Martin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table copies of an urgent call for action put out by the Alberta Association for Community Living. The call for action warns of cuts to funding and services for individuals and families served by the PDD Board.

I also have letters from Lorraine Bens, Kathleen Chalmers, Mary Markowski, and Vahini Govender, who are just a few of the many people who have written to express their serious concerns about these possible cuts.

Thank you.

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

**Dr. Pannu:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling the executive summary and key recommendations of the 1998 report of the Auditor General on Alberta registries made to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. This report identifies serious privacy and security concerns which clearly have not yet been addressed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to take this opportunity to table five copies of the Liberal opposition paper Our Plan for Public Health Care: Creating a Healthy Future, Bold Innovation, Strong, Steady Management. This is in response to the Premier's request for information and suggestions on public health care.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. R. Miller:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this afternoon and table the appropriate number of copies of a letter written by a constituent of Edmonton-Rutherford by the name of Shannon Critchley. She also includes a letter that she wrote to the Prime Minister. In both of these letters she expresses her grave concerns that the comments by Mr. Klein indicate that he may in fact be contemplating contravening the Canada Health Act, and she has very serious concerns about that.

Thank you.

3:10

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, pursuant to the Legislative Assembly Act I will table with the Assembly today the appropriate copies of the following Members' Services orders. First of all, Members' Services Committee Order 10/05, which came into force on August 31, 2005; Members' Services Committee Order 11/05, which will come into force on April 1, 2006; Members' Services Committee Order 12/05, which will come into force on April 1, 2006; and Members' Services Committee Order 13/05, which will come into force on April 1, 2006.

In addition, I'm pleased to table with the Assembly the 18th annual report of the Legislative Assembly Office for the calendar year ended December 31, 2004. This report represents the audited financial statements for the fiscal year ended March 31, 2004, and the eighth annual report of the Alberta branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association.

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. Coutts, Minister of Sustainable Resource Development, responses to Written Question 34 and Written Question 37, asked by Mr. Bonko on November 21, 2005.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Renner, Minister of Municipal Affairs, response to Written Question 38 and return to order of the Assembly 44, both asked for by Mr. Taylor on behalf of Dr. Taft on November 21, 2005.

On behalf of the hon. Mrs. Fritz, Minister of Seniors and Community Supports, return to order of the Assembly 46, asked for by Ms Pastoor on November 21, 2005.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Mar, Minister of Community Development, return to order of the Assembly MR 36, asked for by Mr. Martin on behalf of Dr. Pannu on May 2, 2005.

head: **Projected Government Business**

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

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. According to Standing Order 7(5) I would like to ask the Deputy Government House Leader to share with us the projected government business for the week of February 27 to March 2.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Thank you very much, and thank you to the hon. Opposition House Leader for the question. I'm happy to indicate that starting on Monday, February 27, in the afternoon we will deal with private members' business, written questions and motions for returns will be addressed, and under Public Bills and Orders other than Government Bills and Orders we hope to address bills 201 and 202. Monday evening we should be able to address Motion 501, and

then at 9 p.m. we will continue on with throne speech replies.

On Tuesday we hope to hear a message concerning a supplementary supply, following that, additional considerations for throne speech replies. Tuesday evening we anticipate that throne speech replies will continue.

On Wednesday we should be able to address Committee of Supply, supplementary supply, day 1 of 2, in fact. Wednesday evening we should be able to deal with day 2 of 2 for supplementary supply and, as time permits, consideration of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor's speech in the form of replies to the Speech from the Throne.

On Thursday we should see an introduction of a bill, the supplementary supply appropriation bill, from the previous two days of debate, followed by additional considerations of the throne speech, responses to it quite specifically, and wrapping up with second readings as per the Order Paper and following additional consultation with members opposite.

**The Speaker:** We will now proceed to the notification with respect to the breach of privilege or contempt of the Legislative Assembly. The hon. leader of the third party.

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Having a chance to review the notes for this, I am not entirely satisfied with the question of privilege, and I would ask your leave and leave of the Assembly to withdraw the motion.

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Request for Emergency Debate**

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

#### **Persons with Developmental Disabilities Board**

**Mr. Martin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will proceed. It has to do with the motion announced previously.

Be it resolved that this Assembly adjourn the ordinary business of the Assembly to discuss a matter of urgent public importance; namely, the ongoing reduction in funding and supports provided to individuals and families through the Persons with Developmental Disabilities Board.

Mr. Speaker, there were questions raised in the Legislature about this from one of the hon. members opposite, but I think that all of us as MLAs certainly have been flooded with calls and letters about this issue. Leading into the Assembly, it's certainly the most amount of mail that I've got as the MLA for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. It's a very organized group that feels that there is going to be a serious impact on some of the most vulnerable people in our society: those with developmental disabilities.

Now, Mr. Speaker, speaking to the urgency of this, there seems to be a debate about what is a cut and what is not. The Alberta Association for Community Living believes, in talking to the members in their groups, that there is going to be a severe cut. I know the minister says that it's not a cut because there is a 2 per cent increase in the PDD budget, but I think the point that they make – and it should be clear – is that inflation has been running much higher than that, and institutional inflation usually runs higher than personal inflation. So they believe that this is a serious matter, and the reason they're raising it now is because they know that the budget is coming up probably in the middle of March.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the minister, I believe, said in question period and in my conversations with her that there have been increases in the past. I don't doubt that there have been monies put in in the past,

but that does not help them this year. The point that they're making is that in the services that they're providing, there will be cuts. The urgency, again, is that I am told that the northwest and south regions have already begun to implement such reductions. They're already cutting back in those particular regions, and I'm told that most regions will begin to hold or will shortly be holding meetings with families, individuals, and service providers to discuss how to manage the required reduction in funding if additional funding is not coming.

Now, again, Mr. Speaker, I stress that this is a serious matter. These people are the most vulnerable people in society. They've got families that are under stress. Whether they've had increases in the last two or three years, that's great, but the point is that all they want is to maintain what they've had in the past. They're saying very clearly that they can't do this. Now, we can argue about figures here one way or the other, but the Alberta Association for Community Living and the people they serve are honourable people. They would not be saying this if there weren't cutbacks occurring.

The urgency again I stress, Mr. Speaker, because they know that the budget is coming down, we're told, in the middle of March at the earliest and perhaps the third week in March. If they don't do something about it now, these cuts will in fact occur, and it will have a very detrimental, serious effect on the most vulnerable people in society plus their families. So that's why this is the first chance that we've had to recognize this, hoping that there's still time in the budget to at least – it wouldn't be a lot of money – just bring things up to the inflation level. That's my understanding. That's all they're asking. They're not asking for big increases but just to be able to maintain the services that they've had in the past.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** On this motion, the hon. minister.

3:20

**Mrs. Fritz:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to respond to the motion pursuant to Standing Order 30 that's been raised.

**The Speaker:** We're dealing with urgency here now, everyone, okay?

**Mrs. Fritz:** I'll begin by saying that the premise, Mr. Speaker, of this member's motion is factually incorrect. Although it is an important issue, it's not a matter of urgent public importance that requires the adjournment of our ordinary Assembly business.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide the facts on this matter. As the member mentioned, yesterday I did meet with him to explain the funding for this important program, Mr. Speaker. I would have thought that the member would have taken that to the community and responded to the information that you had shared with me that you're receiving through letters, because you do know the facts from yesterday. We talked. We drew a diagram about that. We went through the budgets for the years, the numbers of people.

I've explained it today in the Assembly once again, as the member indicated to you, Mr. Speaker. Just to reconfirm that to you as well, there is not going to be a reduction. There has not been, and there won't be. There isn't a future reduction coming regarding this budget for persons with developmental disabilities.

In fact, when I spoke about the funding earlier, Mr. Speaker, PDD funding was \$287 million in 1999. It's now reached nearly a half a billion dollars each year. It services 9,200 people, and they receive supports from the program. Those supports or the services are not being cut in any way. As I said earlier, that's a 70 per cent increase. During that same time, caseloads have grown approximately 20 per

cent. It is a significant amount of funding. It averages about \$55,000 per individual so that people can actively participate in their communities.

It's also important to note that nearly all of the people receiving supports in the PDD program, as I mentioned earlier as well, receive assistance from the AISH program. During the past year we increased that living allowance, Mr. Speaker. I explained it to you during question period. It's an issue that is very clearly related to the supports that we do provide.

We did have the building bridges report. We implemented all of those recommendations. I am committing to reviewing this program once again, Mr. Speaker, because that was six years ago for that report. Also, by relooking at it, we can ensure that PDD is meeting the needs identified by families in the disability community, that it's being administered in an effective and efficient way, that it can continue providing supports to Albertans in the years to come.

Also, based on the significant and ongoing funding that's provided to this program and because there are no plans to reduce the provincial support to PDD, I'm looking forward to your ruling on this matter because I don't believe it's an urgent matter.

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

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to participate in the debate surrounding this Standing Order 30 motion. If I consult *Beauchesne's* 387 to 398 regarding emergency debates, there are a number of tests that are set out there. When I look at this issue, which I believe is urgent – and I urge the Speaker to support the motion – I note that a number of tests have been met. This issue is not currently before the courts. It was not mentioned specifically in the throne speech. There is no bill on the Order Paper which is dealing with this issue, nor was any bill outlined in the government press release of February 15 in which their entire spring session agenda was outlined.

The resolution of funding might be met if we knew when the date of the '06-07 budget was going to be, but at this point we have no indication from the government when that would be, so there's nothing before us that would lead us to believe that we could get a resolution to this fairly quickly. There's no notice on the Order Paper for any supplementary supply budget, which might offer some relief to this situation. No bill on the Order Paper, nothing on the legislative agenda from the government, budget is unknown, no supplementary supply indicators that might tell us when this could be relieved. So I believe that there are a number of tests that have been met here regarding urgency, Mr. Speaker.

I also note that *Beauchesne* 389 talks about an issue that is “so pressing that the public interest will suffer if it is not given immediate attention” and 390 that “the public interest demands that discussion take place immediately.” I think what's of the public interest here and the public concern is that the PDD community boards are currently planning reductions in supports and services because the funding projections in the provincial government, or the information they've been given thus far by the minister, is indicating to them that the budget will not be adequate to meet current and upcoming needs, so they can't even stay at the same place. That's why they're talking about cuts. They believe they will have to implement cuts in certain programs in order to deal with the amount of money that's being given to them.

I think that the government action has the following implications for families. This is what captures that public interest and public concern that's noted in *Beauchesne* 389 and 390. There are long waiting lists for the services and support. This places families at risk of receiving less-than-adequate care, and I'll hasten to say that that's

not because any caregiver wouldn't want to give it but that often there's just not enough funding to pay for enough hours, for example. We end up with increased segregation of individuals, placing those individuals in a situation of potential harm or, even worse, of abuse.

The Alberta Association of Community Living, who care for people in their own homes, has only received a 4 per cent raise in the last 16 years, Mr. Speaker, and they note that the wages for their care workers who take people into their homes to look after them are so low that they can't even organize respite care. I think this is part of the urgency debate, and given the leniency you showed others, I appreciate you directing the same towards me.

**The Speaker:** It has been provided.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you.

So in meeting that test that's set out in 389 and 390, I believe these arguments are part of it. It is not in the public interest, and I would argue that it's very much top of mind and of public concern that we do not leave vulnerable members of our society – and specifically I'm talking here about people receiving funding through PDD – in a position where they could be facing harm, facing abuse, or, more to the point in this one, having fewer services available and lowering their quality of life or the dignity that they have in living their lives. I think that's where it's important.

Another example is that the government has clawed back supports for two individuals living under the same care roof, rationalizing that the caregiver should be able to realize efficiencies. Well, that's giving two people in need of care under the same roof even less money to deal with, and that is causing very real stories of harm. I'm not going to go into those individual stories of harm, Mr. Speaker, because I'm cognizant of your concerns about urgency, but I think the larger point here is: how much longer is the government going to ignore problems which grow more critical with each passing and unresolved day?

We see no resolution for this in sight. There's no bill. There's no budget. There's no supplementary budget. There's nothing on the government agenda that indicated that this would be addressed. That's why I believe that there is urgency, and I'm asking the Speaker to recognize both the urgency of the PDD recipients and their situations and the need for an urgent debate to address that.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, there's no coffee in the House or anything else until I declare Orders of the Day, so that is out, please.

On this point of urgency I call on the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner first.

**Mr. Hinman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll just be brief. Two of the problems and why they cause urgency have been pointed out quite well. In the south region I've seen letterhead that has gone out to the various people that provide this service stating that there's a deficit of \$1 million, \$3 million, and \$5 million in the area and that therefore there isn't the funding to follow through with the programs. So they're implementing and having to look at shutting the program down in different areas. They're even having the problem where those that are leaving from child services and going into PDD are running a deficit. The funding isn't there, and there's nothing coming from the ministry to indicate to them that they can accept these new people. So I, too, would like to add my concern from the south region that it is an urgent issue and that there is nothing coming forward from the government that the people in the south are



aware of, and they are wondering how to deal with the shortage in the budget and the money that's being provided for them.

3:30

**The Speaker:** I'd just like to remind all hon. members that urgency doesn't mean that it's important in the sense – urgency refers to the fact that there's no other opportunity to deal with it.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That is, in fact, exactly what I wanted to address. I think that, just by way of reminder, all members would know that Standing Order 30 and specifically (2) states that “the member may briefly state the arguments in favour of the request for leave and the Speaker may allow such debate as he considers relevant to the question of urgency of debate,” which you've been kind enough to flag on various occasions for our attention.

In fact, it's urgency that we should be talking about. In just looking in the dictionary here quickly, urgent is defined as “requiring immediate action or attention,” something that is earnest and/or insistent. I don't think the speakers from the opposite side have proven that case of urgency. Urgent to most of us would likely mean a sudden or a very sharp loss of some kind of a special service, for example, or perhaps something of a detrimental nature by way of a displacement or a dislodging or something along that line or another occurrence wherein somebody might be deprived of a life and death service or something that is critically important.

As we know, PDD is extremely important. This is an area, Mr. Speaker, you'll recall, that I spent six years as minister looking after, and I'm delighted that the new minister responsible has taken up the torch and is moving the ball along in a very positive way, as she indicated in her comments. If PDD recipients were being put unnecessarily at risk or were being put directly in harm's way and there was proof of that or if there were very serious health or safety concerns or other things of that nature, you could in fact perhaps argue a case of urgency. But none of those kinds of examples were forthcoming, and there's no evidence of that whatsoever. In fact, quite to the contrary, I think you would find that our PDD program in terms of budget alone has grown from about \$283 million in 1998-99 up to about \$490 million or \$480 million or somewhere in there, and that would show you how seriously we as a government are looking after PDD recipients, their families, and the important programs.

So it's not in a manner of crisis. [interjections] You know, I offered you the courtesy, hon. yapping members from the ND. I'm just asking that you would shut up for a little while and allow us to make the case too. Okay? This is a very, very serious topic, and you ought not to take it so flippantly as you are right now.

We're not leaving persons without services, so there is no urgency here, Mr. Speaker, and that's the only point that I wanted to make.

**The Speaker:** Anybody else want to get involved? The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster on the urgency.

**Mr. Snelgrove:** Well, I want to speak to the urgency too. Every day, Mr. Speaker, in this Assembly we have the opportunity to question the government on matters of urgent importance or policy. Today not one member of the opposition took the opportunity to question the minister. Our member did. The opposition took the time in question period to talk about three- or four-year-old driver's licence fraud, to question the leadership of the longest serving Premier in Canada. They talked about hypothetical health care gloom and doom, and none of them had the urgency to stand up and

question the hon. minister about it. If it was urgent, that's when they could have addressed it.

**The Speaker:** Anyone else?

Hon. members, the chair continues to be bemused by what goes on in here some days. Normally on the first day after the Speech from the Throne there's a moving of the Speech from the Throne, and it's also customary to allow the Leader of the Official Opposition the maximum amount of time to speak to the Speech from the Throne. Whether or not that will happen today, I guess, will depend on how we deal with this particular matter.

Pursuant to Standing Order 30(2) and the rules

the member may briefly state the arguments in favour of the request for leave and the Speaker may allow such debate as he considers relevant to the question of urgency of debate and shall then rule on whether or not the request for leave is in order.

That's basically what it is. The chair is prepared to rule on whether the request for leave for this motion to proceed is in order under Standing Order 30(2) but first of all, I guess, will review some of the arguments.

First of all, the chair confirms that the ND opposition House leader has given proper notice of his intention to bring a motion under Standing Order 30. Notice of this application and the subject matter was received by the Speaker's office yesterday at 2 p.m. Therefore, the requirements under Standing Order 30(1) have been met. There is a slight difference between the wording of the February 22 memo from the ND House leader to the chair and what is found in the proposed motion, but in the chair's view this does not invalidate the application. The chair also notes that the member was good enough to copy the Opposition House Leader, the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, and a staff member from the Government House Leader's office, which is not necessary but is in the best traditions of the House.

Secondly, before the question as to whether this motion should proceed can be put to the Assembly, the chair must determine whether or not the motion fulfills the requirements of Standing Order 30(7), which requires that the matter proposed for discussion relates to “a genuine emergency, calling for immediate and urgent consideration.” The member's proposed motion is to hold an emergency debate on – and I underline – “the ongoing reduction in funding and supports provided to individuals and families through the Persons with Developmental Disabilities Board.”

The relevant parliamentary authorities on the topic of emergency debate are *Beauchesne*, paragraphs 387 to 398, and the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, pages 587 to 589. The chair has reviewed these references closely in considering this request for leave. I must emphasize to all members that to meet the requirements of urgency, there must not be – underline “not” – another opportunity for the members of this Assembly to discuss the matter. Members might want to reference *Beauchesne*'s paragraph 390 and the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* at page 589.

The chair has listened attentively to the submissions from several members in the House, and although the chair does not want to detract from the importance of this issue, he simply cannot find that this matter constitutes a genuine emergency within the meaning of Standing Order 30. Furthermore, it would seem premature for the chair to find on the first regular sitting day of the spring sitting that there would be no other opportunity to debate this matter. For instance, there will likely be supplementary estimates. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre was of the contention that there was no indication of supplementary supply. Well, it was indicated by the Deputy Government House Leader in Projected Government Business, which is a part of the Routine – one member asks the

question; the other member gives the response – for Tuesday that there may be messages coming for supplementary supply. That will be before the House in the near future.

As well, there is the Speech from the Throne, the throne speech, where all hon. members can wax eloquent on any conceivable subject they want to, and that begins, conceivably, today.

To conclude, although this is a serious matter of concern and consideration for some, this chair, who also is a Member of this Legislative Assembly, has been contacted by some of the people referenced today and been told that there is no problem with funding. The chair cannot participate in the debate, but the chair should report factual information.

So the chair does not consider it of such urgency to warrant postponing the business of the Assembly this afternoon. Therefore, the request for leave is not in order, and the chair will not put the question.

head: 3:40

### Orders of the Day

head:

#### Consideration of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech

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

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

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

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

**Mr. Johnson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is not only a pleasure but also a great honour to rise and move acceptance of the Speech from the Throne given by His Honour the Lieutenant Governor.

In his remarks the Lieutenant Governor mentioned the opportunities he had to meet people during our centennial year. The Wetaskiwin-Camrose constituency was pleased to welcome His Honour when he visited to participate in the presentation of centennial awards to outstanding Albertans of my constituency. I would like to thank His Honour for visiting so many of our communities to bring a spirit of celebration to all Albertans. The year 2005 was a very special year, and all members of this Assembly considered it a special honour to be serving the people of Alberta during our centennial.

For this legislative session we continue in the same spirit as we celebrate the 100th year of the opening of the first legislative session of our province. For over a century the governance of our province has been stable, effective, and all Albertans have been served very well. This is a special place for legislators to be, and I hope that we continue to govern with as much vision as did our predecessors in this Chamber.

In this special year I especially want to recognize the Premiers of this province: Haultain, Rutherford, Sifton, Stewart, Greenfield, Brownlee, Reid, Aberhart, Manning, Strom, Lougheed, Getty, and our current Premier, the hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow. The leadership and accomplishments of these individuals and all elected members have brought us through the last century to where we are today, with a bright future for the century to come. Alberta today is strong, and the people are optimistic when realizing the potential of tomorrow. Our government has built a great foundation with a world-class education system, an innovative and responsive health care system, state-of-the-art infrastructure, and a quality of life

second to none. This foundation allows Alberta to grow and become stronger.

To continue to be successful, our government will continue to work in answering the needs of Albertans. Over the long term our government will address Albertans' needs through our 20-year plan. This plan outlines the importance of learning, innovation, high quality of life, and economic prosperity as the pillars of a strong Alberta. Yesterday's Speech from the Throne, delivered by His Honour, lays out the steps, guided by the vision contained in this 20-year plan, that will build upon a strong foundation so that Albertans can have an even more prosperous tomorrow.

A principal aspect of our prosperity is education. By emphasizing knowledge and an educated population, Alberta will remain a leader as we move into our second century. We have a great education system both at the K to 12 and postsecondary levels, but there are challenges. Among the challenges are high school completion rates. Yesterday the hon. Lieutenant Governor noted that the government will be addressing the issue of high school completion rates in the coming months, and this is an action which I as an educator of many years applaud. The high school completion symposium not only brings focus to the problem but should provide constructive solutions to improve high school completion rates. Educating our youth provides benefits for our entire province by preparing young Albertans to succeed in life.

However, our goals in education must go far beyond increasing high school completion rates. I am pleased that we have made great progress this past year in improving access to our many great institutions of higher learning through investments in the access to the future fund and the creation of new scholarship programs. This is a good start, and throughout this year our government will strive to make the postsecondary system more affordable and accessible to allow Albertans of all ages to advance their education.

Already new approaches are increasing access to higher education. Thanks to pilot projects such as the on-site apprenticeship training program at Fort McMurray, which brings the instructors to the apprentices rather than the other way around, and video conferencing via Supernet, which allows students to attend classes in their own communities, new educational opportunities have been created without having to wait for the construction of postsecondary facilities. Creative measures such as these will prove especially beneficial for Albertans who live a great distance away from postsecondary learning centres.

[Ms Haley in the chair]

Additionally, the Speech from the Throne outlines government plans to partner with aboriginal groups and industry on new training projects for aboriginal people. Having the opportunity to serve on the aboriginal education subcommittee, I'm aware of the challenges of aboriginal education, and I commend the government on new initiatives to partner with aboriginal groups and industry on new training prospects for our First Nations peoples.

A final point on education which I would like to raise deals with the shortage of skilled labour in this province. With the emphasis that the Speech from the Throne places on advanced education for Albertans as well as increasing opportunities for new Albertans to enter the workforce, our current skills shortage is on its way to being alleviated.

Our future prosperity is also found in a strong economy. Alberta's economy is largely based on the development of natural resources. The strength of resource development is very important in ensuring a strong rural Alberta and a strong agricultural sector. Representing a riding with both rural and urban components, I am very aware of

the challenges facing rural Alberta and agricultural producers today. I am pleased to see the measures suggested by His Honour yesterday with respect to helping rural Albertans and the agricultural industry.

Alberta's agricultural industry is largely dependent upon exports. It is a good initiative to work with the federal government in securing better markets for our producers and breaking down barriers to trade. Helping our agricultural producers remain competitive will be a great help to keeping Alberta rural communities strong and vibrant, as will the priorities of the rural development strategy. A key objective of the Alberta rural development strategy is to create the conditions whereby more people are enabled to live in rural centres. The emphasis on creating more opportunities for youth to stay in rural Alberta and to move to rural Alberta is indeed visionary.

My constituency is home to a prime example of how a rural development strategy can materialize. Recently Augustana University College and the University of Alberta merged to form the University of Alberta Augustana campus in Camrose. By offering the world-class programs of the University of Alberta in a rural setting, young Albertans have the opportunity to complete their postsecondary education in a more familiar environment where they will be equipped with the skills to establish careers and families in rural communities.

Madam Speaker, we all know very well the importance of resource development to the Alberta way of life. To ensure that the resource industries, whether it be agriculture, forestry, or energy, can succeed over time, our government is committed to supporting research and development. Research is critical to unleashing the innovation in resource industries to ensure continued economic growth. These innovations are taking place in research institutions such as the Alberta Research Council, an organization I am proud to chair. The Alberta Research Council is a key organization in helping the government of Alberta achieve its strategic innovation agenda. By delivering innovative science and technology solutions, ARC meets the priorities of industry and government in Alberta and beyond.

One example of ARC's work in finding solutions is found on a feedlot not far from Vegreville. This Alberta company is testing a revolutionary new system that takes feedlot manure and converts it into usable energy sources. The integrated manure utilization system, also known as IMUS, uses anaerobic digestion to produce biogas, mainly methane, to generate electricity. Recovered nutrients are used as fertilizer. This type of ingenuity has taken what is commonly thought of as a problem and created profitable solutions for agricultural producers.

In taking a look at the broader picture, energy is a key economic thrust for Alberta. The Alberta Energy Research Institute and the Alberta Research Council are at the forefront of developments to ensure that Albertans have access to secure energy sources while balancing economic prosperity and environmental needs. This represents a new frontier for the energy industry. This industry has demonstrated time and again that it has the will and tenacity to find new energy sources and see to their efficient and beneficial development. Challenges will include securing new supplies and better methods to obtain existing supplies of our conventional oil and gas, best methods to obtain energy from our oil sands, and a new look at the coal industry and new ways of obtaining biofuels.

3:50

Thinking of our vision today, I am reminded of Dr. Karl Clark, the so-called father of the oil sands. Dr. Clark while at the ARC and with the University of Alberta in the 1920s studied Alberta's tar sands as a road-paving material before focusing on developing the

hot water extraction process that energy giants like Syncrude and Suncor still use today. His work has allowed the development of an oil sands industry that is outputting close to 1 million barrels a day and is a rapidly growing energy source. Dr. Clark is a role model to the scientists and researchers of today as they unleash the potential of new energy sources and will undoubtedly continue our prosperity.

I have strongly emphasized the potential of research as it relates to energy, but more work continues through the Alberta Science and Research Authority and the other research institutes – the Alberta Agricultural Research Institute, the Alberta Forestry Research Institute, the Alberta life sciences institute – along with the Alberta Research Council and other universities and colleges to bring innovative ideas to maturity. These institutions house some of the best and brightest minds from Alberta and around the world. This is why it is so important to move forward in our postsecondary educational institutions to ensure that Alberta researchers will remain in the vanguard when it comes to developing new technology.

It is important to emphasize that investments in research have some very practical benefits to Albertans. An important component in moving the Water for Life strategy forward is using research to secure and manage clean water sources for the future. Research will also guide the development of the land-use framework mentioned by His Honour. Research will ensure that future land uses can balance personal and economic needs with the protection and security of our natural landscapes.

The hon. Lieutenant Governor's remarks yesterday also outlined the government's commitment to the health of Albertans. Everyone in this Assembly wants the best health care system possible for Albertans. We need not all agree on what form that should be, but we all want the best care for our loved ones and for all Albertans when they need care. I'm pleased that quality health care is a top priority for the government and that the objective is to increase access and reduce wait times, especially in areas of breast cancer care, coronary bypass, MRIs, CT scans, and prostate cancer.

In particular, I want to thank the government for bringing forward Bill 1, the Alberta Cancer Prevention Legacy Act. We have all been affected by this dreaded disease, whether it is a loved one, family members, friends or neighbours or even personally, and I commend the hon. Premier for committing our government to the big-picture goal of setting the stage for a cancer-free future. The \$500 million outlined in Bill 1 will allow for continued advancements in cancer research, which will develop new treatments and better methods for dealing with this dreaded disease.

Recently I had the opportunity to tour the Cross Cancer Institute and observe their research programs. The Cross is a research hospital that very effectively integrates research and clinical activity. It provides care and research, which means that there is a much faster translation of research outcome to patient care. Beyond the labs and screening devices there is an excitement amongst the people at work there in the hope that someday – someday – we will be free of cancer. It was impressive to sense the teamwork toward the ultimate goal, and I admire their dedication. The Cross is one example of the innovation and forward thinking in our health care system, and I support our government's desire to develop a framework to permit continued innovation in other areas to allow Albertans to have better access and care within the health system.

Much of my speech today addresses the issue of using strengths to ensure continued prosperity. Another link to securing future prosperity in the province is the government's commitment to sound fiscal management by saving – saving – some of today's windfall revenues to protect against future shortfalls.

During the economic prosperity of the late '70s and early '80s the

government of the day under Premier Lougheed with great vision established the Alberta heritage savings trust fund. It was to address the basic principle that Alberta's resources belong to the people, including the children of today and the generations to come. Recognizing similar prosperity of current times, I congratulate and support the savings initiatives contained in the throne speech for further investing in the heritage savings trust fund and other visionary endowments such as the access to the future fund, the ingenuity fund, and the Alberta heritage fund for medical research.

Government endowments along with investments and infrastructure projects are a means of translating today's resource revenues into a lasting means of supporting the well-being of Albertans. We can do nothing less for ourselves and the future generations than to invest in the heritage fund and our own endowments to permanently support the building of a strong and resilient Alberta.

Madam Speaker, Alberta has come a long way in its first century. Our story is one of hard work and perseverance, a can-do attitude coupled with a willingness to help out those who need it. Our history tells us as much about our present as our future because as someone once said: it's hard to know where you are going unless you know where you have been.

I applaud the government for the Royal Alberta Museum initiative and encouraging that our story will be told and retold through our museums, including the Reynolds-Alberta Museum in my constituency. Our museums, big and small, throughout Alberta will transfer the wealth of knowledge to upcoming generations.

The Speech from the Throne is about building a new and better Alberta, rising on a foundation well established in the hard work of the past and based on the objectives of our government's 20-year plan. We have the privilege of living in a province of almost unlimited potential, and I look forward to working with all my colleagues in representing the best interests of Albertans in this Chamber.

Thank you very much.

**The Acting Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

**Mr. Webber:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is an honour for me to have the opportunity to second the Speech from the Throne. I would like to thank our hon. Lieutenant Governor for delivering the speech yesterday and for setting an ambitious and exciting tone for this legislative session.

The government's upcoming plan contains many vital pieces that will affect the lives of Albertans in all parts of the province. Importantly, much of the government's agenda includes talking to Albertans to ensure that their needs and desires are known. Working together we will achieve what we desire.

I recently celebrated my first year as a Member of the Legislative Assembly, and my experience has shown me just how much people contribute to make this great province better. Not only my colleagues here in the Assembly – and perhaps I'm biased – but it seems like so many of these thoughtful and helpful people live in my constituency of Calgary-Foothills. There have been so many times in the past when I've been inspired and motivated by the passion of my constituents. I am confident that we will find further success as we move forward in this exciting time in our province's history.

As the hon. Lieutenant Governor stated yesterday, this year we are celebrating 100 years of democracy in Alberta. A short century ago at McKay Avenue school the First Legislature assembled and began mapping the journey towards an exciting future. It was a time of incredible growth that stretched the boundaries of a new province's resources and experience, but the people met the challenge head-on and laid the foundation for a prosperous Alberta.

**4:00**

This year, the first year of our second century, we must once again face the perils of growth, but this time we will be tackling this problem as the economic powerhouse of Canada. Like they did a century ago, we will prevail. The government of Alberta's objective is very straightforward: to make Alberta the best place in the world to live, work, raise a family, and grow old. Achieving that goal requires carefully setting priorities, which were outlined by the Lieutenant Governor yesterday. These priorities are: creating a learning society, staying true to our fiscal principles to ensure a prosperous society, taking appropriate steps to have a clean environment, a healthy society, and finally a safe and caring population. These are the priorities that will define Alberta in its second century.

Madam Speaker, a safe and caring society is one where people have respect for one another. Our aboriginal population is one of the most important assets we have. We need to include and support them, and we need them to provide input into our future. Our children, which are the future, need to be protected from the negative effects of family violence as well as from the devastation of crystal meth and other drugs. I'm optimistic about our government's commitment and approach toward these problems.

Our seniors, who built this province, persons with disabilities, and adults who receive continuing care need to know that they will be cared for with the highest level of dignity and respect. Last year I had the opportunity to co-chair the MLA Task Force on Continuing Care Health Service and Accommodation Standards. During our consultations with Albertans I heard many stories which had a great personal effect on me. I'm certain that as we implement new standards for the province's lodges and supportive living and long-term care facilities, Albertans will once again feel confident that they will receive the level of care they expect and deserve.

I'm convinced that Albertans will receive the best quality health care possible. The current health care system is not sustainable, and it is not working as well as it can be. Madam Speaker, we have a population that is growing very fast. We also have a population that is aging. The health care system must evolve to meet these growing needs. Thankfully, this is the government's top priority this session. Wait times were reduced with the Alberta hip and knee replacement project and will now be reduced in the areas of breast cancer care, coronary bypass surgery, MRIs, CT scans, and prostate cancer care.

Albertans will also benefit from new primary care networks that will begin operating this year. The government is setting up to become a world leader in cancer research, screening, and prevention. We have the resources and the opportunity to make great gains in the fight against this disease. The Alberta Cancer Prevention Legacy Act will help us make these gains. Being a leader in the fight against cancer is a vision that I proudly support.

The throne speech outlined our government's focus on a clean environment. The Water for Life strategy, the land-use framework, and the environmental youth summit are all vital components of an overall strategy that will ensure the sustainability of our resources and the beauty of our land. But when we look for ways to preserve and improve our environment, we must remember and understand our role as a global energy producer. As the Lieutenant Governor stated in his speech, Alberta enjoys a considerable energy advantage in the world. We have advanced our technology in the extraction of resources considerably but must continue to find better and more efficient methods.

We also need to invest our earnings into the development of cleaner sources of energy. I must admit that I'm excited about the potential of clean-burning coal. We have a unique opportunity to develop and utilize this resource and to establish it as an important energy resource of the future. The government of Alberta has

embraced this opportunity, and in doing so, we will certainly create a legacy for future generations.

Alberta's legacy has already begun. The world's attention is focusing on our province. It is with great pride that Alberta will be featured in the Smithsonian Institution's Folklife Festival in Washington, DC. There's so much that Albertans want to share with the rest of the world. I think I speak for most Albertans when I express how thankful we are for this opportunity to be displayed at the Smithsonian.

One thing that Albertans would like to show the world is our ability to survive through difficult situations as well as our ability to evolve. Alberta's agricultural sector has had a difficult time in the past few years. Yesterday the government pledged to stand by our agricultural producers, and we have also worked with producers to develop new markets. Already many producers have found new agricultural opportunities. Madam Speaker, I applaud their innovation.

Our forestry producers have also faced adversity. This industry is extremely important to our economy and our future. The government's commitment to the Alberta Forestry Research Institute will go a long way to guarantee the sustainability and competitiveness of this renewable industry.

With respect to ensuring a viable economy, I am most optimistic with this government's commitment to rural development. Although I represent the good urban people of Calgary-Foothills, I'm a strong believer that for Alberta to reach its full potential, we must ensure that citizens in every part of the province have the ability to contribute. I am confident of the comprehensiveness of the rural development strategy and the government's strong commitment to this cause. Rural Albertans need improved access to health care and learning as well as enhanced opportunities for youth. This is where the government will focus its efforts. I look forward to the day when no matter where in the province one lives, one can expect outstanding services and an abundance of economic opportunity.

I believe that creating the conditions for a strong and diverse economy is the most important responsibility of any government. Citizens need to contribute, and they need the opportunity to achieve what their hearts and minds desire. Creating such conditions has traditionally been this government's strength. We will never be satisfied with the status quo, and we will always work to make the economic situation better. This is why the government will work to remove red tape as part of the comprehensive regulatory review. Albertans have proven themselves as hard-working entrepreneurs, as innovators, and as achievers. The government cannot stand in the way of their progress. Our responsibility is to encourage growth, not stifle it.

Like the elimination of red tape for business, the Calgary and Edmonton ring roads are a great example of what government should be doing to assist people in their economic endeavours. The paving of 1,000 kilometres of highway is another. The government's funding to meet the infrastructure needs of our growing economy is impressive. It is no secret that we need people to move to Alberta, but they will only stay if we have enough hospital beds and school spaces for them and their families. Our investment in infrastructure this year is an investment in the viability of our future.

Yesterday the Lieutenant Governor told Albertans that the government will make a \$1 billion investment in the heritage savings trust fund. Albertans can rest assured that some of today's prosperity will be saved for the benefit of future generations.

Last year the Alberta government focused on education. This year we will continue this focus because Albertans know that building and educating tomorrow's workforce is one of the wisest investments we can make. I am very glad that Alberta's students will once

again get relief from the rising cost of tuition. More importantly, however, they will benefit from the new tuition policy that will be put forth by the government this year. The ability to pay simply cannot stand in the way of a postsecondary education.

In a high school completion symposium the government will ask our youth why high school completion rates are low. I am certain that our youths' input into the problem of low high school completion will give us many of the answers we need to improve these rates.

Finally, a new focus will be put on addressing Alberta's labour shortages. Like I said earlier, our aboriginal population is one of the most important assets. Aboriginals are younger and growing faster than any other segment of the population. Knowing this, the government will continue partnering with aboriginal groups and industry on new training projects for aboriginal people.

We have to do everything we can to make Alberta the destination of choice for skilled immigrants, but when they get here, we also have to make their transition into our economy as easy as possible. This will improve with the government's expansion of immigrant settlement services and language training.

Madam Speaker, the Lieutenant Governor's Speech from the Throne highlighted the Alberta government's vision for this province, this comprehensive and ambitious vision of a learning society that is prosperous, with a clean environment and a healthy, safe, and caring population. I can't tell you how proud it makes me to know that I, along with my fellow Albertans, will be a part of this vision. It truly does sound like the best place in the world to live, to work, to raise a family, and to grow old.

Thank you.

4:10

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

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. On behalf of all Albertans and as Leader of the Official Opposition it's my duty and my privilege to respond to the Speech from the Throne delivered in this Assembly yesterday. Just a few days ago I was asked to compose a letter for inclusion in Alberta's time capsule, which was sealed up on Family Day at the Royal Alberta Museum. I was only too happy to write the letter. I considered it an honour to offer my thoughts to the Albertans of tomorrow, just as I consider it an honour to address Albertans today.

In a democracy communication is vital, even communication that has to bridge the span of many, many years. Just as I left a note for the Albertans of the year 2105, Albertans of our past have left a lesson for us. But given their tendency to offer outdated solutions to new challenges, given the lack of substance or imagination in the throne speech or the Premier's television address, except perhaps the very imaginative statement that Alberta currently uses clean coal for half of our electricity needs, which is, of course, completely untrue, I have to wonder if the Conservative government has ever paid attention to the lessons of history or if they've ever really given thought to the message they're sending to tomorrow's Albertans.

The idea behind the time capsule is to give our descendants a glimpse of what life was like in early 21st century Alberta. It's a gesture of goodwill from one era to another, a sign that we care about what happens in the future. When you put something into a time capsule, you're preserving a bit of the past, even if it's just a few ideas or mementos, for the benefit, if only educational, of future Albertans. In other words, you're trying to leave some kind of legacy to the people who will follow in your footsteps. After listening to the government's throne speech, I have to ask: aside from a few token projects, where is Alberta's legacy?

In my letter to the Albertans of the future I wrote down a few of my hopes for them: that democracy in Alberta had been reformed to better reflect the wishes of the electorate, that the arts in Alberta were flourishing, that government was responsive and accountable, that the environment was pristine and pure, that Alberta had the best public school system in the world, that health care was publicly funded, world-class, and accessible to all. I also wrote that I felt a responsibility to help create the conditions that would make a better tomorrow possible, that we, the Albertans of today, would show the imagination and responsibility to invest Alberta's incredible wealth so that Alberta could at last escape the cycle of boom and bust and build a permanently sustainable economy.

I believe that Albertans have a responsibility to work towards the fulfillment of these goals, but I see little evidence in the throne speech that the current government has sufficient imagination and will to build a better future for our province, and that is a tragedy because right now Alberta stands on the threshold of true greatness.

We have all the elements in place to create sustainable prosperity for many decades to come. Our growing educated population and our immense resource wealth have given us a chance to invest in our future, to create a permanent prosperity, to fund world-class public health care and public schools in perpetuity, to build an artistic and cultural legacy that will stand the test of time.

A hundred years will pass before Albertans read the letters sealed in that time capsule, and I can't help but wonder if they'll look back on the century we have yet to build with gratitude or with disappointment. We have a duty to ourselves and to our children to make the most of the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity of our current circumstances. The Conservatives have had 35 years to get health care right, to get long-term care for seniors right, to get balancing a budget right. Our economy is booming like never before, and even that isn't helping this government get things right. For every surplus they seem to discover brand new ways to spend the money now instead of investing in the future.

After 35 years their creative well has run dry. Their most visionary idea is to reform the health system, but the reforms merely lay the groundwork for dismantling public health care piece by piece. Instead of truly reforming the health care system to help it meet the needs of the 21st century, they'd rather go back to the good old days, when families often had to sell their homes to pay for life-saving medical treatment. If those families were here in this Chamber now, they'd tell us: "We've been there. We've tried that. It doesn't work. Why? Why are you turning the clock back?" Conservatives are trying to turn back the clock because they don't have the imagination or the desire to search for better solutions. Yes, the public health care system needs help. Yes, it needs to be improved, but it doesn't need to be dismantled.

This government's time has come and gone. It simply doesn't have the energy and desire that are needed to take advantage of the incredible opportunities before us. By the Premier's own admission this government is running on autopilot, spending unearned surpluses like there is no tomorrow. The only problem is that there is a tomorrow, and we have to start building it now.

[The Speaker in the chair]

There are those who believe that Albertans have little to complain about given the strength of our economy and our high standard of living. I don't deny that times are pretty good for many but far from all Albertans. I think we have to look at our overall situation more closely and examine the many challenges and contradictions of life in Alberta today.

Take, for example, our democratic deficit. Alberta is one of the

wealthiest jurisdictions in the world, but prosperity without transparent, accountable, truly democratic government isn't really prosperity at all. When democracy is weak and secretive, when the primary purpose of government is merely to be re-elected, the province's wealth is far more likely to serve the ends of industry and government than of the public. If our prosperity is to serve the citizens, then we the citizens must take charge. Unfortunately, this government has no interest in doing anything to renew our democracy. It has shown little interest in electoral reform, for example, and such reform is absolutely necessary if we want a democracy that accurately reflects the desires of the electorate.

Just as importantly, Alberta desperately needs a government that is willing to embrace accountability and transparency. Alberta has no lobbyist registry, no fixed election dates, no all-party policy committees, almost no meaningful legislative review of public spending. We need the courage to give our Public Accounts Committee some teeth so that MLAs can do a more effective job of keeping track of government spending. We need to protect the public interest by creating a lobbyist registry, stronger conflict of interest rules, and legislation to protect whistle-blowers.

In order to meet the challenges of our booming economy, our swelling population, and our changing role in Confederation, we need a robust, full-blooded, vigorous democracy, one that can adapt to the rapidly changing needs of its citizens. More importantly, democratic renewal is worth pursuing for its own sake. Albertans value freedom, fairness, trust, honesty, and accountability, virtues that need to be in generous supply in a 21st century government but that are sorely lacking in the government we are under now.

4:20

Consider the strains our booming economy is putting on our environment. Albertans have always treasured this province's land, water, and wildlife, and they've always known that our future prosperity lies in the careful stewardship of natural resources. For the last century or so the demands of our modern economy have put an incredible strain on the environment. We need to rediscover the balance between protecting our environment and ensuring that Alberta's economy remains healthy. We need smart, sustainable, responsible economic growth, growth that preserves what some economists are calling our natural capital, while maintaining the high standard of living we all enjoy.

Instead, what do we get? We have policies such as this government's minable oil sands strategy, which claims to protect the environment but instead writes off vast parcels of Alberta's north as an industrial zone that threatens to become a wasteland. Similarly, when it comes to managing Alberta's watersheds, currently the only solution to addressing water shortages is to enable bulk water transfers from one basin to another. It's a band-aid solution that doesn't address the very real and pressing issue of wise water management.

As stewards of the land we have a responsibility to remember that our environment is the foundation of our prosperity and that it deserves respect for its own sake as well as its ability to fulfill human needs. If we take care of nature, nature will continue to take care of us. Alberta is one of the most bountiful pieces of real estate on the Earth, but our use of this land is haphazard at best. Prime agricultural land is being eaten up by suburban sprawl while golf courses, housing, and oil wells are being built within eyesight of one another. Our cities are growing without a plan, and our industries have to struggle to discover where they can and cannot build.

Coal-bed methane has turned out to be one of Alberta's most promising new resources, but we're extracting it without a plan and without sufficient regard for the environmental consequences.

Alberta's governments have promoted our diverse wildlife as a tourist attraction, but our expanding cities and towns are putting more and more pressure on wildlife habitats, including those of such tourist-attracting creatures as caribou and grizzly bear. Disregard for the natural world has caused other problems, from BSE threatening our cattle industry to chronic wasting disease affecting both wild and harvested deer.

Our saving grace is this: every challenge our environment faces is also an incredible opportunity for economic growth, for scientific discovery, and for improvements in our quality of life. If we can finally recognize that the environment is the source of all our wealth and, in fact, of life itself, we can redefine our role in nature. We can find a way to enjoy Alberta's bounty without destroying it and to share the most beautiful place on Earth with all the other life that has come and has as much right as we do to live here. That is the reason our caucus recently released a paper on land-use strategy for Alberta.

Here's another challenge, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's vast natural resources have brought immense wealth to our province, but 91 per cent of energy revenues in the last 25 years have been spent, meaning that less than 9 per cent have been saved.

Alberta's heritage fund, which was intended as Alberta's savings account for petroleum revenues, has lost nearly half of its value when adjusted for inflation. It's fine, it's great that the Conservative government has recently pledged to add a billion dollars to the heritage fund, thanks I think to pressure from the public, from the opposition, and even from former Premier Peter Lougheed, but we need a long-term plan for savings, not just a deposit every now and then.

Petroleum revenues are nonrenewable. We must use them to build truly lasting prosperity, not merely for paying today's bills. Our province's wealth should be used to address our very real and pressing social needs, to rebuild and repair our infrastructure, and most importantly, to ensure that our prosperity lasts and won't fade away when the last drop of petroleum is squeezed from the earth.

Alberta has one of the strongest economies in Canada, and people living in the Edmonton-Calgary corridor enjoy one of the highest standards of living in the world. Yet, Mr. Speaker, children are going to school hungry in Alberta; use of food banks continues to rise; the gap between rich and poor keeps growing. According to the TD Bank – get this, all of you MLAs from Calgary – 42 per cent of Calgary residents are living on less than \$20,000 a year. The rising costs of housing have kept many Albertans from pursuing the dream of owning their own home. Government spending has been rising rapidly, but our social programs are failing to meet the needs of Albertans.

Agriculture has been the backbone of Alberta's economy from the beginning, but today's farmers are more vulnerable than ever to fluctuations in world markets, legislation by other governments, and Alberta's unpredictable weather. If we really care about our farmers, we need to develop systems that will help them manage these problems.

Mr. Speaker, these are just a few of the economic challenges we need to face, and we can face them best by investing in ourselves as Albertans. Alberta citizens, the individual men and women who define our province, are the true source of our wealth. Fostering an atmosphere friendly to businesses, particularly small business and family business, is just as vital as investing in the health, education, and social welfare of Albertans, the very same Albertans who provide labour for private industry and who purchase its goods and services.

Perhaps the greatest challenge but the one with the greatest potential rewards is to build the world's first truly sustainable modern economy, the basis of something we must eventually

achieve on this planet: a zero-waste society. If we can make today's industry sustainable while at the same time developing the new sustainable industries of the future, Albertans have a very real chance of guaranteeing our prosperity for decades to come while at the same time preserving and protecting our environment. That, Mr. Speaker, is a dream worth fighting for.

Finally, consider the social challenges we still face. Too many Albertans face insurmountable barriers in their struggle to share in the prosperity that should be available to all Albertans. Alberta's most vulnerable citizens, despite or even because of the challenges they face, have made important contributions to our culture and economy. Let me ask, Mr. Speaker: shouldn't our guiding principles involve care and compassion for vulnerable persons? I'm glad to see that after years of Liberal urging the government is planning to look at fixing long-term care for Alberta's seniors. I hope they follow through because our seniors have suffered long enough. Nearly every Albertan knows someone who could benefit from a more compassionate, more ethical, more logical approach to the problems of homelessness, human rights, senior care, education, and accessibility. Isn't it time to reach out to our neighbours to help them enjoy the full range of opportunities our province offers?

4:30

Our education system alone is facing a wide range of challenges. Right now only about 69 per cent of Alberta's students graduate from high school within the normal three-year span, and only 75 per cent graduate within five years. Considering the demands and the opportunities of Alberta's growing economy, considering that within a decade Alberta could face a labour shortage of a hundred thousand people, it's incredible that we're wasting the talents of so many young people. We need students to stay in school, and we must provide the support they need to complete their education. For years our education system has had to struggle with rising demands and shrinking resources. Growing numbers of children with special needs aren't getting the attention and help they need because our schools don't have enough teachers or counsellors or specialized staff. Teachers are forced to teach to standardized tests despite their individual understanding of specific student needs.

What about our cities, Mr. Speaker? Our cities are growing faster than ever, but many new communities still have gaping holes in the landscape where new schools should be. Families in new suburbs are busing their children to older, established schools, but many of those schools are being closed down, and student populations in already crowded surviving schools continue to rise.

Alberta's modern, high-tech economy demands an educated workforce, a workforce with diverse education, including the fine arts, engineering, the sciences, and more, yet Alberta's tuition fees are rising faster than those in any other province, putting higher education out of reach for an alarming number of Albertans. The government's promise to cover this year's tuition increase is a good step, but what Alberta students really need is something more than just makeshift. What they really need is a policy to keep our colleges and universities accessible to any one who has the desire and drive to continue their education.

There's lots of rhetoric, Mr. Speaker, from this government about the value of the family, yet often both parents are working with no guarantees that daycare is available, safe, and a good environment for their kids.

Though not a crisis, Alberta's crime rate is cause for concern. Gang-related crime in our cities is putting a huge burden on police, and it's making our neighbourhoods unsafe. We need new strategies that will not merely punish criminals but eradicate the root causes of their behaviour. Though Alberta is seen as a land of plenty by many

Canadians, Albertans are turning to drugs and alcohol and gambling in troubling numbers, and drug addiction is a growing problem, particularly in rural communities.

We can meet these challenges. We can resolve these contradictions if we take a good hard look at our society and start investing in Alberta's greatest resource, its people. To overcome these challenges Alberta needs leadership that's not afraid to shake things up a little. Alberta needs a government with the imagination, the vision, and, yes, the intelligence to make the choices that will address the challenges we currently face while ensuring that future Albertans will benefit from those choices.

Mr. Speaker, on Tuesday night the Premier urged us to imagine Alberta. Ironically, his slickly produced vignette showed that more imagination was put into the spin than the substance, but I'll take the Premier at his word and imagine what Alberta could become if we have the courage and wisdom to invest in our future.

Imagine waking up on the morning after election day five or six years from now. You look up the election results on the Internet, and you discover that the number of seats received by each party accurately reflects their share of the popular vote. Imagine never having to vote strategically again because you head into the polling station with the ability to rank the candidates in order of preference. Imagine that voter participation in this province climbed from 45 per cent to 85 per cent because citizens felt committed to the political process, because they finally have the voice in the government they'd always hoped for, because government was truly representative.

But don't stop there. What if with just a few clicks of a mouse you could look up Alberta's new lobbyist registry, a website that keeps track of which special-interest groups are currently lobbying the government for action? What if you felt like you could trust your elected representatives to work for the greater good because there were systems in place to make sure government had to remain open and accountable to the electorate? What if we could rebuild the sense among elected officials that they serve the public, not the other way around? What if instead of smothering dissent, our democracy encouraged and embraced it? What if the government involved opposition parties in the decision-making process instead of shutting them out, effectively silencing the voices of hundreds of thousands of Albertans? What if Albertans could be excited about politics again instead of cynical? What if we could restore our faith in the democratic process? Imagine, Mr. Speaker, truly accountable government. Imagine a government that listens and responds to the voices of Albertans with honesty and sincerity. Imagine democracy with room for everyone.

What if 50 years from now you could once again drink straight from Alberta's lakes and rivers knowing that they were as pristine and pure as they were before Alberta was born, or if you could watch free-roaming herds of buffalo roaring across the prairies as they used to, protected in vast wildlife parks rivaling the Serengeti? What if Alberta created the most energy efficient economy in the world and eventually a zero-waste economy, one without emissions, one without landfills? What if 10 or 20 per cent of Albertans lived off the grid in homes that generated their own heat and power? What if office towers in Alberta were designed to put power back into our energy grid instead of draining it? Imagine if most Albertans drove only for occasional trips because smart urban planning and convenient, inexpensive public transit have made cars mostly unnecessary. Imagine if pollution were a thing of the past and that the clean air and water helped cut asthma and cancer rates in half.

We could transform. We could transform Alberta into a world-renowned, environmental paradise, a place where prosperity doesn't come at the expense of but, rather, because of a societal commitment

to environmental stewardship. Alberta could become the world's number one destination for ecotourism and the world leader in renewable energy technology.

Technology already exists that collects greenhouse gases and pipes them into depleted oil wells extracting the last of the oil, thus sequestering the gases safely within the earth. We can build on this technology to turn other pollutants into similarly valuable tools. We can protect Alberta's natural heritage as one of the most beautiful places on earth without sacrificing our prosperity. In fact, a whole new environmental protection industry could become an important – who knows, perhaps the most important – sector of Alberta's economy. Albertans could be the first people in history to finally strike a balance between high quality of life and responsible stewardship of the environment. We – we – could be the society that leads the way to a cleaner, greener, sustainable world.

#### 4:40

Imagine your morning commute some years from now. Maybe you're enjoying the convenience of a well-designed, reasonably priced transit system. As you travel you see, amazingly, that the streets are in good repair, that the sky is free of smog, that the traffic is flowing smoothly. On the radio an announcer reports that Alberta's accumulated savings continue to grow and that the endowments for Alberta's schools, hospitals, and infrastructure have finally grown large enough to protect Albertans from any economic slowdowns.

At long last Alberta's economy has reached its full potential, and its wealth is being put to the best possible use for the benefit of all citizens. Good jobs are plentiful, and educational opportunities are varied and uniformly excellent whether you're seeking a degree, diploma, or technical training. In fact, Alberta has the best educated workforce in the world, and that has led to a vibrant arts scene, more efficient and innovative businesses, more effective government, and cutting-edge work in the sciences. Health care is not only fully publicly funded, but it's the best in the world, which it once was in Alberta.

Taxes are competitive, covering the province's needs without burdening families or businesses.

Homelessness: how do we accept homelessness in Alberta? Homelessness is virtually nonexistent as are food banks, which were unknown two decades ago, because Alberta's prosperity has finally reached out to touch everyone in Alberta.

The environment is recovering and even blossoming because Alberta's experience in cutting-edge research has created the world's first truly sustainable modern economy, an economy no longer vulnerable to the unpredictable highs and lows of resource revenues nor dependent on those nonrenewable resources.

Thanks to extensive investment in research and development Alberta has become a world leader in several economic sectors, including renewable energy, medicine, computer software, and nanotechnology.

Alberta's wise investments and dynamic economy have made it one of the world's leading lights, a source of inspiration for other jurisdictions, and a destination of choice for tourism, investment, and immigration. Alberta's burgeoning cities are centres of industry, commerce, and the arts, drawing the best and brightest talent from around the world. Creativity, education, and diversity are highly valued as engines of economic sustainability and social cohesion.

Imagine having the peace of mind that comes from knowing that not only is your own future secure, but so is that of your children and grandchildren. Imagine Alberta as a place of perpetual prosperity. Imagine if our seniors lived free from fear, if minorities were not merely tolerated but embraced, if no one went hungry or without a



decent place to live. Imagine the best health care system in the world, a universal system widely recognized as our best economic and social asset. Imagine if an end to poverty were finally in sight.

What if 100 per cent of Alberta students completed grade 9, and what if 95 per cent completed high school? What if 85 per cent went on to earn a degree, a diploma, a trade certificate and accomplished it without incurring years worth of crippling student debt? What if Alberta's arts scene grew both in economic impact and artistic reputation to rival those in Toronto or Montreal, in San Francisco and Edinburgh?

Imagine closing the doors on the last food bank in Alberta because its usefulness had finally come to an end. Imagine full employment for all Albertans with disabilities. Imagine that, Mr. Speaker. Imagine if Alberta's rate of mental illness dropped from the highest in the nation to the lowest. Imagine an end to gang violence in Alberta and the lowest crime rates in the country. Imagine if every single member of Alberta's First Nations finally had the means, the respect, and the support to find meaningful work, to live without thought of racism. Imagine if racism and sexism were no longer issues in Alberta because we finally learned to look beyond our differences and work together to build stronger, safer, happier communities. Imagine a society that values creativity just as highly as productivity, compassion just as much as competitiveness. Imagine if we fostered an attitude of dignity and respect towards people making use of social programs. Imagine a community spirit of shared responsibility. That's what our caucus imagines for this province. That is our dream for a better Alberta.

This government's dream by comparison is simply too small. This is not a time to be conservative, if you'll forgive the pun, about Alberta's future; this is a time to be bold, to be visionary, to be creative. The Conservatives don't have the vitality to imagine a grander future for Alberta. You know, Mr. Speaker, it's not even their fault. After 35 years of massive majorities any party would have grown as complacent, as tired, as bereft of new ideas as the Conservatives.

The Alberta Liberal opposition, on the other hand, looks ahead to an amazing future for Alberta, one with unparalleled opportunity and enduring prosperity, fairness, humanity, and generosity, citizens flourishing in a healthy environment, and, for the first time in far too many years, open, accountable government.

I hope that all MLAs will pay attention to this: in the last election more than half of Albertans rejected the Conservative vision, or should I say lack of vision, for this province. Those of us sitting in opposition represent the votes of more Albertans than those MLAs sitting on the government side. To me, Mr. Speaker, that says that Albertans are ready to move forward, to leave behind an old, tired Conservative government and move on to bigger and better things. They're ready for change. They're ready for innovation. They're ready for a new, young, energetic government that isn't afraid of dissent, that isn't bound by ideology, that is ready to be open, accountable, and responsive to the electorate. The Alberta Liberals are ready to bring the dreams of Albertans to life. We're ready to lead. We're ready to serve. We're ready to start building tomorrow's Alberta.

When Albertans celebrate the province's bicentennial in the year 2105, I think we want them to look back on the last 100 years, the future that we have the responsibility to build, with pride, not regret, and with appreciation for our wisdom, not disappointment at our lack of vision. If there is a time to dream, it is now. If there is a place to dream, it is Alberta. Let the Albertans of the future remember us as fondly as we remember Alberta's founding people, the men and women who made our prosperity and freedom possible.

Mr. Speaker, that is our response to the throne speech and our vision for the opportunities ahead. Thank you very much.

4:50

**The Speaker:** The hon. leader of the third party.

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to present the response of the NDP opposition to the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor's Speech from the Throne. I would like to begin by commending the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor for his excellent work on behalf of all Albertans. He has very large gardening boots to fill, and I think he's doing a very good job.

I would also like to begin by thanking the citizens of Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, who have shown their confidence in me once again. I will continue to do my very best to represent the interests of the hard-working people of Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Speaker, if the government's televised address by the Premier could have been likened to a very good beer commercial, that has excellent visuals and about as much content as a beer commercial, then I think the Speech from the Throne could be likened to a testimonial for very, very flat beer indeed. The speech lacks sparkle. It lacks life. It lacks anything of interest. I think it would be better poured down the drain of history.

I want to begin by suggesting that the government's cancer initiative is a very good idea. I believe that with an aging population and with an excellent cancer infrastructure already in place in this province, it is a good place to build. I will give the government credit for that. At the same time, Mr. Speaker, the government can take steps and should have taken steps to reduce the incidence of cancer through prevention, and they have not done so. In particular, the government has failed to implement a comprehensive workplace ban on smoking, something that would not cost the taxpayers of this province any significant money and would have a great effect, in my view, on reducing the incidence of cancer. That's something that they could have done. It's fine to spend a great deal of public money on fighting cancer – and I think that needs to be done – but the government is talking out of both sides of its mouth on this issue and in not taking simple, logical steps in the area of prevention has stood up for the tobacco industry instead of Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk a little bit about the third way, which is sort of a now you see it, now you don't kind of initiative on the part of the government. The government has been making various proposals for the privatization of health care for a number of years now. First of all, there was the Mazankowski report. Then there was the so-called Graydon report. The government has recently introduced a number of proposals, including looking at private insurance through a contract let to Aon insurance, one of the biggest insurers in North America. They don't see the conflict inherent in that. The government has also talked about allowing doctors to operate in both the public system and the private system. The government has also talked about particular types of procedures that one would have to pay for separately. Yet, it has disappeared. It is completely off the radar screen. It is now just completely invisible. The question is: why is that?

Just a few months ago the government was talking about the third way. Now it is not present in the Premier's televised address. It is not present in the throne speech. It apparently will represent a very significant part of the government's legislative agenda for this session once the budget has been passed, yet Albertans don't know what's there. There can't be a public debate over the government's proposals because the public is unaware of what the government's proposals specifically are. I think that that, Mr. Speaker, is deliberate.

The government would like us to believe that they have withdrawn or are not sure or haven't worked out the details. I think otherwise, Mr. Speaker. I think that the government is deliberately withholding the third way proposal from the public so that it can't be debated in public, there's not enough time to organize against it, and it cannot be used to challenge the Premier in the leadership review that he faces in about a month's time in Calgary. I think that once the Premier's leadership issue is dealt with, we may well see it again. In fact, I predict that we will.

The Premier today challenged the opposition parties to put forward ideas for improving our health care system that would save money or improve service. That was his response when he was challenged about why the government is keeping their plans secret from the public. What the Premier neglected to tell people, in fact, is that in this very House during the fall session I introduced a private member's bill, the pharmaceutical savings act, which would have seen the government follow the lead of New Zealand and bulk purchase pharmaceuticals at lower rates in order to pass those savings on to Albertans and to the health care system generally. That has the potential to save millions of dollars from the health care budget. Of course, even the government will admit that drug costs are one of the leading causes of increases in the health care system. So there are concrete and practical proposals, but once again the government, rather than taking a good, practical, tried-and-true suggestion, would rather protect the pharmaceutical corporations and the high prices that Albertans have to pay. The government is on the side of big pharma and not on the side of the sick in this province.

I want to say, Mr. Speaker, that since the last election it's been the NDP opposition that has led the fight on health care and led the fight against the government's third way. We have had public hearings and public meetings throughout the province. We've put out materials. We've had news conferences. We have done the heavy lifting on the fight against the government's third way.

I want to give a message to the government. It doesn't matter when they introduce their proposals for the third way. If those proposals include two-tier private health care, this party and a majority of Albertans will oppose them and will fight tooth and nail to prevent the government from bringing in two-tier private health care. The people of Alberta do not want this. If they did, the government would be of course proclaiming its plans from every rooftop in the province. They're not doing that, and the reason is: they know that Albertans do not want two-tier private health care.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk a little bit about long-term care because that's another area where the NDP opposition has led the fight and was able to get the Auditor General to look at the issue. By working with members of the public who were concerned about this, we've been able to bring forward the issue. The Premier stood in this House and promised to implement every single recommendation of the Auditor General, but what's been happening – what's really been happening – is that the government has been allowing operators to convert long-term care beds to assisted living beds, where there is no regulation whatsoever. So while they're promising to enforce tougher regulations in nursing homes and other long-term care centres, what they've really been doing is allowing the operators to escape any regulation whatsoever through the back door.

Again, Mr. Speaker, it's been the NDP opposition that's led the fight on this issue and has done the heavy lifting to make this an issue and to force the government to promise. We will make sure that the government is held accountable and that it keeps its promises because there have been a disturbing number of broken promises by this government in just the past few years.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I want to talk a little bit about the environment. I have to say that the throne speech is very strong on the

environment because most of the promises are recycled, and many of those have to do with the environment.

The NDP opposition proposes the establishment of a green fund. We believe that the wealth which is produced in this province through the oil and gas revenues belongs not just to this generation of Albertans but belongs to all Albertans, and that's something that the government doesn't seem to get. We believe that a good portion of that revenue needs to be put into a green fund to invest in energy alternatives. We believe that this province should remain the energy leader into the future but that that future does not necessarily mean that we will be leading in petrochemicals. We have the opportunity, if we want to take it, to establish Alberta as the green energy leader in the future. There are many investments that can be made. We can work with other provinces and with the federal government and even with the private sector in order to make sure that Alberta remains the energy leader.

5:00

I want to say as well, Mr. Speaker, that the government proclaims that education is a high priority, but it's interesting that the throne speech has very few actual references to educational policy. There are really no answers for postsecondary education. The tuition freeze sounds good, but again the government is simply saying that this increase in tuition is being held in abeyance instead of putting in place a long-term plan for tuition in this province. We've called for a learning commission for postsecondary education, and we believe that all of the stakeholders, including students and potential students, need to be involved in setting the goals for postsecondary education in this province.

Mr. Speaker, there is absolutely no urban agenda present in this speech. There is not a strong commitment to community policing. There's not a strong commitment to public transit. There's not a strong commitment to housing. Those are all priorities for Alberta's large cities, and it's almost like they've been forgotten.

If cities have been forgotten, then certainly low-income people in this province have been left completely out in the cold. As the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview has said, we've been besieged by phone calls and letters from people who are concerned about the situation facing people with developmental disabilities. The government has once again failed to keep its promises to those people.

Mr. Speaker, as well, the government has forgotten about labour. Labour used to be considered one of the partners in building this province, and it has been many years since this government recognized the role of working people in building this province. During the strike down in Brooks the minister talked about the possibility of first-contract arbitration, but he set it for two years ahead. Clearly, that's not a sincere promise. That's just an attempt to deflect a lot of concern that had developed right across the province about how those workers were treated and their lack of ability to get a first contract. This has been a problem again and again. The government has set in place some of the worst labour legislation in the entire continent, and working people are falling behind as a result. The income gap in this province is widening notwithstanding the prosperity that generally prevails.

Farmers also receive nothing but recycled promises in this throne speech, the same old stuff almost verbatim from the speech before. The government is not dealing with the income gap for farmers, the gap between what they have to pay for their input costs and what they receive for their goods. Instead, they spend their time attacking the Wheat Board and other means by which farmers can receive a better share of the value which they create.

Mr. Speaker, just in conclusion, I want to say that this document

is remarkable for its lack of vision and its lack of answers for the people who produce the wealth in this province. Whether they work on the farm or in the factory or in the commercial sector, there is nothing here for those people. It's ironic that we have been asked to imagine a future by a Premier who leads perhaps the least imaginative government in this province's history. Albertans are known for their initiative and independence, and they deserve a government that gives the same.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Honourable members, I did not invoke Standing Order 29(2)(a) for the Leader of the Official Opposition, so I will not invoke it for the leader of the third party but will with the next successive number of speakers.

I will now call on the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

**Mr. Hinman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great privilege to rise and to address the Legislature today, and I'm grateful for the time that I've been allotted to respond to the Speech from the Throne. I would also like to take this time to address the Legislature on what I have heard and learned from the people of Alberta this last year. They say that if you want to know, go, and if you don't, then send somebody. Indeed, great rulers and leaders are in touch with their people. However, their success brings a problem of silencing new ideas or progression and supports the status quo.

I sympathize with our Premier and cabinet. I know people who want to be counted as loyal and supportive and, therefore, often restrain themselves from telling it like it is. Because of this they often fail to bring forward good and innovative ideas. In this situation a leader needs to go to the people in disguise in order to hear and see what the people really are saying. We've heard of many stories in the past where a leader has disguised himself as a peasant and gone out to the people and was surprised at what he really heard when he was back amongst the people. We have listened to the rhetoric that only bigger governments care for and protect the vulnerable. We know that this is a fallacy. It means nothing; they are empty words.

I am surprised that there was no mention of tax relief in this speech. We must reduce taxes and our dependence on universal programs. We have listened for decades about a federal government that is going to eliminate poverty when, in fact, all they have done is make the poor more dependent than ever on them. We need to reduce the size of government, red tape, or the paper shuffling, and reduce our taxes. To simply eliminate the health care premiums would do all three.

We need to raise our basic tax exemption to \$20,000, closer to the low-income cut-off level. We need to urge the federal government to follow suit. It is sad and shameful to me and to many people that I have spoken with that they do not encourage or allow those who are the poorest among us to enjoy the fruits of their labour.

We have a major shortage of workers in the service sector of our economy. Why would we not allow a person on AISH, PDD, CPP, or Canada disability pension to go out, if they're able, and earn another thousand dollars a month without being punished with clawbacks or taxes? It is also very regressive for those people that are trying to pass on a small business or family farm that the government seems to be the biggest partner at this time and destroys the economy and those small businesses.

A strong and prosperous society is built from strong, debt-free families and small businesses. We should urge the federal government to reduce or remove capital gains and allow tax deductions, say 15 per cent, off people's income to go towards home ownership purchases, as we do with RRSPs. Our relationship with our new

government in Ottawa should be one which is constructive, not destructive. For the first time in a very long time we have an opportunity to work with the federal government. It is incumbent upon our government to set the example and not be the distraction.

We have a great opportunity to work with a federal government who is interested in property rights. They seem very interested in letting the province come up with provincial programs that will work for our province. We do not need nor do we want the federal government telling us how to care for our citizens with federal programs, universal programs from cradle to grave, from daycare programs to senior citizens.

Universal programs are a bottomless pit. They're a socialist ploy to break down society and to make people dependent on a government. Once people are dependent on a government, they continue voting for that government. They use jealousy, greed, and envy to excite the people to vote and take away the wealth from those that are motivated, dedicated, and innovative workers and give it to those who are not.

As a member of the opposition I have also heard that people want us to work together. We should work with this PC government, who did not receive the majority of votes, though they did receive the majority of seats.

5:10

We want to keep on track. We need to change our attitudes, and we need to recruit our superstars in academics and health care providers. We have lost a great deal of Canada's best, that have left to go to other places in the world because of our high taxes and social programs that are here. We need to encourage them to come back from the United States and Switzerland and other places where they have gone and enjoy this great country of ours.

It's imperative that we take a world view on what we are trying to do here. It's not good enough to say that we're the best in Canada or North America, that we have the lowest taxes because we're not just worrying about North America. We're dealing with the world. We have booming economies in Third World countries where we're going and taking out their best, trying to lure them here, to Canada, for a better life and a better living for them and their families. But we could be looking for those that have left to go to the States and other countries to come back by competing with those tax breaks.

We would never consider shortening the time of our star players on the ice or in other areas. We would never think of covering one eye of one of our best golfers and telling them to go out and compete in the world with only one eye. We would never consider putting weights on the ankles or on the wrists of our women's hockey team, saying that they're too good and they're destroying the competition in the rest of the world. We want to be and can be the very best in the world, and that should always be our goal.

By recognizing, praising, and rewarding excellence, we build a road to success that inspires others to put in the hard work and dedication to reach the top. Just as Sir Edmund Hillary, I'm sure, has inspired a member of this House to reach the highest point on Earth, we can do that in other aspects as well.

Our facilities in Canmore and the Olympic Park have paid off great dividends. We can and do compete with the rest of the world. It is time that we take off the economic shackles here in Alberta and in Canada as a whole and let the best rise to the top.

The government must reduce its social programs and economic engineering to allow taxpayers to direct a percentage of their taxes to a charitable or nonprofit organization of their choice, whether it's a women's shelter, a health region, food banks, or such organizations as the Salvation Army or the Mustard Seed.

We could further enhance our communities by implementing a

more equitable formula and return to communities a percentage of revenue generated from those communities through taxation, everything from fuel taxes to business to income taxes.

I have great faith in Albertans and Canadians giving of their time, talent, and money to build their communities, whether it's through their church organizations, their service clubs like the Rotarians, Lions, and Kinsmen amongst others. I have great faith in them, more faith than I do in the government, who claims to care but does not solve the problems at our community level.

We do not need nor can we offer bigger government, higher taxes, and more universal programs to build our future. Rural Alberta is becoming anemic from taxation. Indeed, municipal governments are suffering and are forced to cannibalize their local economies through ever-increasing property taxes, while the federal government and provincial governments get fat from income taxes, business taxes, user fees, GST, employment insurance fees, along with so many others, not to mention the pimping and proliferation of the vices of gambling, liquor, and pornography, just to name a few, and grabbing the accumulation of wealth, which they put into their fat accounts along with all the resource revenues, and then reducing the people as well as municipal governments to come begging on their knees for grants to sustain their communities.

I am very optimistic about what we have ahead of us. At this time we are going to go for another Olympic gold and be the best in the world. Are we happy to be the big fish in a very small bowl? We need to go out onto the world stage and do as we want to do with cancer research and be the best. The world is shrinking at a very fast pace. It is time for us to match it by growing to meet the challenge. There have been ideas already presented such as ethanol development and clean-coal technology. Much like our current potential we do not understand it or realize it, and we're not capitalizing on it properly.

There is nothing wrong with competition, especially when it is with those providing health services. We should not be dictating; we should be facilitating competition to help get greater health in our communities. There are different health regions that want to provide services, but they are being told that, no, they cannot. We're concerned about the safety or the dollar spent. We are suffering in the current health situation because of the monopolies that are produced and continue to be sustained through our health regions. We need to allow those health regions and their experts to decide how they can best serve the people in their community.

I'd also like to comment a little bit on our current democratic deficit. Right now perhaps one of the biggest and most problematic things that we're facing is openness and accountability. I feel that that could be dramatically changed if Alberta were to take the lead and be bold and bring forward legislation that would allow recall to the people. When the people have no force, they give up. They become apathetic. We have an opportunity to bring in recall. With recall people would be accountable. All people who are elected would be accountable to those who elected them. They could not be blue one day and red the next day without the people having the power to recall them.

It wouldn't have to be complicated. If one were to put a simple formula in place, whether it's 25 per cent or 35 per cent, for those eligible electors to bring forward a petition and to give it a certain amount of time, perhaps 90 days, and to notify the elected individual that this is going on, people would and could be accountable to those that have elected them. It's important that as elected people we are accountable to those that elect us and that we don't turn a blind eye and say: well, you can debate that four years from now, and we'll see what you think of it then. It's easy to postpone, and therefore things are forgotten too easily.

We have such an opportunity here as we go forward into the future. I'd like to address a little bit the agricultural problems. In the throne speech we talked about a prosperous society. We talked about low taxes, but nothing again, as I said, about reducing taxes.

One of the other things that people have brought up and that has amazed me is the fact that we are competing with some major economies elsewhere in the world. Those economies do not have the social benefits that we do, and they don't have the tax structure that we do. For us to think that it's only the United States that we're busy competing with, we're going to run into a brick wall. We have other economies that are going to scoop business and work from our country and take it elsewhere. We need to reduce taxes. We need to reduce red tape. We need to look and carefully scrutinize the regulations that we have in place.

It doesn't do us any good to say that we're not going to burn coal here when China has online 500 coal-generating plants to be built. We could and should lead that coal research and have clean coal because other places in the world are going to have to use that coal and will. Like with the Candu reactor we also could implement and share that technology that has been developed here in Alberta around the world, which truly would make for a better world to live in.

There are so many areas that we need to address. We need to be the ones that are forward-thinking. We need to be the ones that are thinking of the world and the global economy. We cannot turn a blind eye. We have a superheated economy here in the province. Now is not the time to pour more money and try and have an auction sale with only one tractor to purchase or one earthmover. We need to have the wisdom to realize the importance of putting away money and using it at the best time possible.

We're putting undue problems on local and municipal governments, telling them how and where and when they must spend the money and with too many conditions. We need to take a step back and remember that if we have the money in the bank, we can always spend it next year or the year after that. We have gone through a decade of saying that we don't have a deficit when, in fact, we've had a major infrastructure deficit. We can't cure it all in one year. I would urge the government to continue to relax the conditions which they are giving to those municipal governments to spend that money. It would be a great benefit to them.

We read in the throne speech that the province has updated the stumpage. One has to ask: what do they mean when they've done that? From the research that I've been given, they've reduced the stumpage fee and lowered the cost, therefore allowing the industry to compete better, but then it seems like that our U.S. counterparts put on countervailing duties that continue to destroy the economy. We need to back up. We need to remember what we did in the '80s when the boom was over and we couldn't balance the books. In order to get the economy going again in the oil and gas business, the government dropped the input costs and the tariffs and other things in order to allow that business to go forward.

We've done nothing but say that we're going to stand by the people in agriculture. I would urge this government . . . [Mr. Hinman's speaking time expired.]

5:20

**The Speaker:** Thank you very much, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is now available if anybody wishes to participate. The hon. minister.

**Mr. Stelmach:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** On the question-and-answer portion.

**Mr. Stelmach:** Oh. No.

**The Speaker:** The next speaker is the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

**An Hon. Member:** No. He's the next speaker.

**The Speaker:** There is no next one that I have. If the hon. minister wishes to proceed, that's fine.

**Mr. Stelmach:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour and a privilege for me to respond to the Speech from the Throne during this the 100th anniversary of the Alberta Legislature. My grandparents came to this country from an autocratic empire in 1898 and along with so many other pioneers laid a foundation for 100 years of democracy in this province.

I, too, want to recognize the pride that Albertans have in their province. I witnessed their love of Alberta in hundreds of different ways across the province and, in particular, in my own constituency of Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, and I agree with His Honour that Albertans' optimism is well placed. Alberta is beginning its second century from a very enviable position. Today Albertans are the pioneers of Alberta's second magnificent century.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to touch on only a few themes in the throne speech that are of particular interest to me as Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations. As Albertans we have so much to be thankful for. We are debt and deficit free, have the best health care system in Canada, the best infrastructure in Canada, and really the best education system in Canada. Canadians by the thousands are awakening to the appeal of Alberta's quality of life and opportunity. This discovery is reflected in our high population growth, low unemployment rate, the highest average income, and the lowest overall taxes in the country.

We have so much to be thankful for due to the leadership of our Premier. He has led this province from red ink and pessimism to boundless opportunity and hope, hope for a prosperous future. On behalf of my constituents, Mr. Speaker, I thank the Premier for all he has done in setting new sights to challenge Albertans' innovative skills and entrepreneurial nature.

Mr. Speaker, Canadians have recently democratically opted to change the federal government, and we welcome this change. Albertans need not mistrust Ottawa or guard against the pillage of our constitutional rights to manage our natural resources. Albertans can feel unshackled from the nagging angst and mistrust over what Ottawa will do to us. We can use this opportunity to focus on a new positive relationship with the federal government. Alberta will work to build a relationship based on mutual respect for the Constitution, a clear understanding that governments are responsible for providing the most efficient public services possible.

Mr. Speaker, by focusing on Alberta's place in the world, we will influence the national agenda in a very positive way. We will continue to lead in environmental policy, with practical and measurable results. We will lead in sustainable economic growth and environmental stewardship. We will lead in all the quality-of-life indicators that make Alberta a magnet for entrepreneurial initiative in both the public and private sectors. I believe the new federal government will give credit where credit is due in terms of emission reductions and technological advancements and achievements proven out by Alberta companies.

In this century Albertans will witness several dramatic changes. Change is inevitable, and it's natural. Just think of the massive changes in society that Albertans born in 1905 were witness to: the remarkable growth of our cities, mechanized agriculture, two world

wars, a devastating economic depression, the rise of the automobile, the landing of man on the moon, the rise and thankfully the fall of communism, and the biotech and digital information revolution. In this century we will see the rise of China as the world's largest economy, with India and Brazil rivalling for the number 2 spot.

Future Albertans like my proposed grandchildren will have to contend with the transformation of hydrocarbon energy as the primary source of fuels for transportation and electricity to other less-emitting energy fuel sources. In fact, Pat Daniel, the CEO of Enbridge, has called petroleum and natural gas transitional fuels and is already planning for ways to become a leader in alternative energy. Clean coal will be a part of the answer and will keep Alberta in the energy-production game. So will the renewable fuel resources from bioproduction and other new technologies.

Mr. Speaker, it is the government's duty to prepare the next generation with the best tools to find their own way in their own time, and during this century Alberta's economy will need to change from one that derives most of our wealth from resources deep underground to one that relies on the ideas and entrepreneurial skills of Albertans. We can lay the groundwork for this new economy today by providing opportunities for the commercialization of new technologies right here, in Alberta, by making the investment in our physical infrastructure that makes Alberta the best place in North America to live and raise a family.

This is why I believe that the government's vision for a society that places a high emphasis on education and training is the responsible course to take. Albertans know that building and educating tomorrow's workforce is one of the wisest investments we can make, and I applaud my colleague of Advanced Education for his initiative to develop a new tuition policy for postsecondary education in Alberta. Tuition needs to be an affordable investment for all those who want to pursue their personal goals for education. Tuition needs to be affordable, but remember that what we get we pay for in life. We need to find a balance between affordability of tuition and quality of education. Quality instructors and institutions do not come cheap. I believe that Albertans understand that we will do better by focusing on the highest quality of education and training possible to position Alberta for success in a rapidly changing world marketplace.

The only barrier to our success over the next few years, Mr. Speaker, is the shortage of labour. Alberta's labour shortage will become more acute in the next number of years unless we take more steps to increase the employment rates for our aboriginal population and attract and retain more Canadians from other provinces and immigrants from other countries. Once again the government is taking the right steps to address labour shortages that threaten economic growth. This includes partnering with aboriginal groups and industry on new training projects for aboriginal people.

I am particularly pleased that my colleagues and I will get a chance to develop a new strategy to increase awareness of Alberta as a destination of choice for skilled immigrants. I look forward to working with the federal government on the immigration file and will seek their support to expand immigrant settlement services, language training, and make it easier for foreign-trained professionals to work in Alberta.

**The Speaker:** Hon. minister, I apologize for interrupting, but the chair will invite the hon. minister to continue to debate as this item goes back on the agenda.

Hon. members, the House now stands adjourned until Monday afternoon at 1:30 o'clock. Have a great weekend.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:30 p.m.]

