

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, March 22, 2006**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 06/03/22

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. We give thanks for our abundant blessings to our province and ourselves. We ask for guidance and the will to follow it. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Restructuring and Government Efficiency.

Mr. Ouellette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a few guests joining us today from Red Deer county: Reeve Earl Kinsella, councillors Reimar Poth and Jim Wood, and County Manager Rob Coon. They are here today to meet with both hon. members from Red Deer and myself to discuss very important municipal issues. I'm so pleased that these hard-working members of Red Deer county are able to be here to enjoy question period and to take an interest in the budget speech. They work very hard for all constituents of Red Deer county. They are joining us today in your gallery, Mr. Speaker, and I would ask them to rise and get the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure that I rise today to introduce to you and to members of this Assembly three very good friends. First off, Louise Kidney, who's lived in our area for some time, Calgary-North West, has been a very good friend and supporter over all the years that I've certainly been in public office, has lived in Mirror, Alberta, as well. The second individual is Jeff Gaulin, who likewise lives in our area of Calgary-North West, attended parent meetings last night with Royal Oak and Rocky Ridge, looking for schools in the area. He's a very good person, friend, and supporter. Jeff actually works with Molson Canada. I should mention also that Louise has done a lot of work with SuperNet on behalf of the province over the years. The third individual is Ravinder Minhas, the owner and CEO of Mountain Crest breweries. His slogan is Damn Good Beer. I have to take that on the recommendation of others. He and Molson's can sort that out. I'll ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly 64 enthusiastic grade 6 students along with their teachers, Mrs. Michelle Armstrong, Mrs. Krista MacGregor, and David Mireau, along with parent helpers Julie DeRose, Leah Steiner, and Jo-Anne Balla. They're all from the St. Mary elementary school in my constituency of Edmonton-Whitemud.

Mr. Speaker, I know that you've read *Parent* magazine and you'll know that St. Mary's was the cool school last year. These students are here today to observe and learn with keen interest about our

government. They're seated in both the members' gallery and the public gallery. I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Government Services.

Mr. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great opportunity today to introduce to you a resident of Rocky Mountain House and a great golfer but also, more importantly, the superintendent of the Wild Rose school division, Greg Thomas. I'd ask that he rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

Ms Calahasen: Mr. Speaker, what a pleasure it is for me to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly a young lady who hails from High Prairie, Alberta. She is a member of the PDD board in the northwest region, a small business owner, and, of course, an active member of the family farm. Recently she was elected as president of the Lesser Slave Lake PC Association. She is seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask that she rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to the other members of this Assembly a group of very bright and able grade 6 students from Lacombe upper elementary school. They're accompanied by their teachers, Mr. Derek Rankin and Mrs. Carrie Lisafeld, some parent helpers as well: Mrs. Miriam Kunz; Charlene Drozd; Margaret Church, a very close neighbour and friend of ours; Mr. Alvin Peck; and Mr. Phil Boston, the bus driver. They're seated in the public gallery, and I'd like them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

As well, Mr. Speaker, I have a couple of friends with me from Lacombe. They are Mr. Lennard Vanderschee, the chairman of the board of the Lacombe Christian School Society, and former board member Mr. Dennis MacLeod. They are also seated. I'd ask them to rise and receive our welcome.

Thank you.

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

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of my colleague from Edmonton-Centre it gives me a great deal of pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of active and inquisitive students from NorQuest College in the constituency of Edmonton-Centre. There are 11 students joining us today. They're in the public gallery, and they're joined by their teacher-leader, Mr. Allan Carlson. I would ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly two members of the St. Albert community, Ireen Slater and Bill Alton. Ireen Slater has a wonderful background in associations, the national one parent association and the RCMP Community Advisory Committee, and is also now president of the SUN organization, Seniors United Now. Mr. Alton is the St. Albert director of policy development for the St. Albert constituency, and he's also involved with the organization Alberta and Northwest Territories Regional Council of Carpenters

and Allied Workers. Would they please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly the Candora Society staff of Edmonton. The Candora Society of Edmonton is a not-for-profit organization with a mandate to address the needs of low-income residents of northeast Edmonton. The Candora Society promotes positive growth in the lives of women, children, and families in our community. The society connects people to increase understanding of each other, to reduce isolation, build self-worth, and enrich the community. I would now ask that the staff members of Candora rise as I call out their names and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly: the executive director, Debbie Clark, Kristi Beckett, Shelley Westwood, Jackie L'Hirondelle, Michelle Ackland, Melanie Aloisio, Susan Skaret, Ana Monzo, and Jane Awawias.

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

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted today to introduce to you and members of the Assembly Art Macklin. Art, his wife, Donna, and youngest son, Nathan, operate a family farm in the Peace River country of northwestern Alberta, where he has homesteaded the land from the original forest since the mid-1960s. He is past-president of the Canadian National Farmers Union and is currently serving his second term on the board of directors of the Canadian Wheat Board. Art is also the chairman of the Canadian International Grains Institute. He is seated in the public gallery. I would now ask that he rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

1:40

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure and honour to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly a young man who exemplifies the promise of Alberta's youth. Visiting today is Erik Saude, the co-chair of the Alberta Graduate Council. He was involved in the postsecondary review with the Department of Advanced Education and is in the final year of his PhD in the faculty of medicine at the University of Alberta. Erik's research is focused on the development of nuclear magnetic resonance as a diagnostic and prognostic tool for pulmonary disorders. He is a varsity athlete. He received the Jimmy Condon award. He is ranked nationally in track and field and is an academic all-Canadian.

I have had the great privilege of spending time with Erik since he happens to be a constant companion of my daughter, Robyn, and I know first-hand that he is not only a fine academic, but he rustles cows with the best of them. Mr. Speaker, Erik Saude is seated in the members' gallery this afternoon, and I would ask him to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: Did you leave out anything?
Others? The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mrs. McClellan: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure for me to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly my long-time friend and past colleague Wendy

Crawford. Wendy and I had the opportunity to serve on the Alberta association of adult and continuing education for a number of years. Wendy has stayed with that role, and of course I came here. Wendy is accompanied by a visitor from Texas, her friend Shirlie Childers. Shirlie hails from the Dallas-Fort Worth area, finds the snow a bit much, but we're delighted to have you here, Shirlie. They're seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask that they rise and receive the very warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Herard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured today to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly two Calgary entrepreneurs, Mr. Glen Gurr, who is an insurance broker in my constituency and a long-time community volunteer, and Mr. Trevor Tomanik, who is in the food and beverage and property development business. I assume that they're in the members' gallery, and I'd like everyone to provide them with a warm welcome.

Thank you.

head:

Oral Question Period

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

Progressive Conservative Leadership Campaign

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday we had one cabinet minister resign to pursue the Conservative leadership, and no doubt we will see others departing soon. My questions are to the Premier. Can the Premier please explain to the Assembly the concerns that prompted him to require cabinet ministers to resign if they are pursuing the Conservative leadership?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, you know, I hate to say it, but really it is none of the Leader of the Official Opposition's business. The appointment of cabinet is the prerogative of the Premier, and I think that the question is entirely inappropriate.

Dr. Taft: Well, Mr. Speaker, my second question is also to the Premier. For the record is it the position of this government that anyone seeking the leadership of the Conservative Party must not under any circumstances use government resources such as aircraft, automobiles, staff, or office supplies to support their leadership campaign?

Mr. Klein: To support their leadership campaign, no. That is forbidden. To conduct their ministerial duties, yes. They can use the resources that are available through the government.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: given that flight logs for government aircraft were freely accessible without FOIP until about two years ago, when the public became very interested in them, will the Premier return to a policy of full accessibility to complete flight logs so everyone can monitor the use of government aircraft by leadership contenders?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, the use of aircraft by leadership contenders if they're using it for leadership purposes will be suspended.

Mr. Speaker, relative to access to the files it's my understanding that the last time there was a FOIP request, it involved boxes and boxes and boxes and just an extraordinary amount of administrative

time. If the request is reasonable, I don't see a problem. Very often the request might be reasonable, but it involves a tremendous amount of time on the part of the aircraft staff and all of the public service employees. You know, we will try to accommodate the Leader of the Official Opposition and any other member of the public as best we possibly can if the request is reasonable.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation to supplement.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will say to the hon. Leader of the Opposition that those aircraft logs will be available fully to everyone probably next week in the library.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Gambling Self-exclusion Program

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week I spoke to a woman who had a serious gambling problem who told me how she finally convinced herself to sign up for the government's voluntary self-exclusion program, whereby a person with a gambling problem agrees to ban themselves from casinos. She was surprised to find out that the applicant has to wait two days, then bring the form back to the casino. In that two-day period her resolve failed, and she proceeded to go on a six-month gambling binge that cost her at least \$75,000 and nearly destroyed her marriage. My questions are for the Minister of Gaming. Why does this government turn away gambling addicts who are pleading for help and tell them to come back two days later?

Mr. Graydon: One of the new initiatives that we just started is information centres in the casinos. There are full-time staff there. You can go up, discuss your issue with them if you wish, pick up printed material on problem gambling, and get information, actually, on the program that he's talking about. It's a program that has been very successful.

Mr. Tougas: Well, I'm going to ask the question again. Why is there a two-day wait period? Is it a cooling-off period? Do you want them to keep gambling?

Mr. Graydon: This has never been raised as an issue before, but I'll be happy to follow up on that.

Mr. Tougas: Well, will the minister commit to changing the rules here and now so that voluntary self-exclusion can occur immediately rather than after a two-day cooling-off period?

Mr. Graydon: No. I suggest that if that is the rule, it was put in after some research and due diligence, so I would expect that to happen before there was any change in policy.

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

Small Business Labour Supply

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Good restaurants in my constituency are shutting down their lunch trade because there is no help. Small business cries for help, yet more than a million young Canadians between 18 and 25 are unemployed, close to \$6 million

budgeted for skills investment last year was transferred to pay for the AISH lawsuit, and 9 and a half million dollars the year before for skills investment lapsed, wasn't even used. For all the talk, skills investment has not been a priority for this government. My question is to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. How will this government ensure that resources for skills development are actually used to alleviate skills shortages for small business?

Mr. Cardinal: Mr. Speaker, as we move forward with our long- and short-term labour force strategy in Alberta, issues like that, of course, will be dealt with. First of all, we want to deal with the short-term issue of ensuring that as the economy grows – and only the Liberal opposition would find anything negative about such a strong economy and so many jobs out there. In fact, in the time they spend criticizing that we have too many jobs, they could be helping us participate in the development of the long-term strategy. We spent close to \$300 million alone through my department to assist in the transition of people getting off social assistance, for an example, and into the workforce.

1:50

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A supplemental to the same minister: will this government continue to let the oil price driven, distorted labour market suck the life out of small business, or can it and will it energetically seek to train the unemployed?

Mr. Cardinal: Number one, Mr. Speaker, we should be thankful that we are blessed with a strong economy in Alberta. Only a good government will do that, and this is a government that did do it. In this area, of course, we are trying our darndest to train as many people as possible to fill these jobs that are out there. It was only 10 years ago, when you drove around the province, that there were people looking for jobs. Today when you drive around the province, all you see is job openings.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Another question to the minister of human resources: how will the minister direct his department's immigration and skills development efforts to deal with the area of greatest need, the labour crisis in small business?

Mr. Cardinal: Of course, Mr. Speaker, that's a very good question because our first priority in Alberta is to hire Albertans first. Then there is also the aboriginal population, with very, very high unemployment. We're concentrating on that. We have the youth. We have persons with developmental disabilities. We also have elderly people that are wanting to get back into the workforce. In addition to that, we want the mobility of Canadians, to be able to move across the provinces to take jobs in Alberta.

In the area of immigration, Mr. Speaker, of course, as you are aware and as the member knows also, some of those policies fall under the federal government. There is a new immigration minister. I am in the process of setting up a meeting with that particular minister to determine how we may improve the situation of immigrants wanting to come to Alberta to live and work. As you're aware, in the past the feds have targeted to have at least 250,000 people per year immigrate to Canada. Now, Alberta in the past only received I believe 6 per cent of that, or about 16,000, and 3,000 of those 16,000 moved back to the larger centres across Canada. Therefore, we definitely need to improve the services, and we have

to work with the federal government to do that. It's not in our mandate to do that.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party, followed by the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Long-term Care Standards

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier promised to implement every single recommendation of the Auditor General regarding the deplorable state of long-term care in Alberta. The government's failure to implement this promise has meant that tragic deaths and severe injuries to vulnerable seniors continue. The \$36 million committed by the government so far is a fraction of what the government's own MLA committee said was needed. My questions are to the minister of seniors. When is this government going to replace the toothless Tory MLA led Health Facilities Review Committee on the management of long-term care facilities with unannounced visits and inspections done by an independent and competent authority set up for that purpose?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a very important committee that the member has addressed here today, the Health Facilities Review Committee. It's an excellent committee that I know has attended to any concerns that are related to long-term care and related to the care side of the standards. As you know, my area is the accommodation standards, but the Health Facilities Review Committee is under the purview of the Minister of Health and Wellness, and I'll ask that she respond to that question.

The Speaker: The hon. member, please.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps the minister can provide the answer in writing.

Instead of downgrading seniors' care, when is the government going to require a registered nurse to be on-site 24 hours a day, seven days a week at every licensed long-term care facility in the province?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, Mr. Speaker, once again, care is not being downgraded, and you know that, hon. member, but I will refer this issue to the Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, the questions about care in facilities quite properly belong with this minister. Standards and the new identified standards, which we've been in consultation on with not only providers but health authorities, are pretty well imminently ready to come forward to this Assembly, but I am not yet satisfied that they're in the proper form. We've done extensive consultation on them. We want to make sure they are achievable, and we want to make sure the plans are in place to effect them. So in due course we will be providing those standards.

Suffice it to say that the addition of the \$36 million, the \$25 million that allowed us to add more supports for lifting patients as well as supports for staffing in the third quarter have been embraced, and we've had many different accolades from groups that say that we are seeing improvements in long-term care as a result of it.

Mr. Mason: Accolades there may be, Mr. Speaker, but people are still dying.

This is to the minister of seniors. When is the government going to put a stop to the redesignations of existing long-term care facilities to unregulated assisted living facilities that either have lower or nonexistent standards of care?

Mrs. Fritz: Mr. Speaker, as I explained to you earlier, the responsibility for this service regarding seniors in long-term care is a shared responsibility between the Minister of Health and Wellness and myself, and I will direct this question once again as it's under the Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I will take under advisement the question from the hon. member, and we will collaborate and provide an answer.

Mr. Speaker, the inference at the start of this question that there is not adequate address of the Auditor General's remarks is totally in error. We accepted and put in place systems to try and work on every front, including support for medication delivery in the proper way and for reconfiguring the mix of administrative support so that long-term care facilities had that kind of capacity.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, followed by the hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Democratic Reform

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have just celebrated 100 years of democracy. In a recent editorial in the *Lethbridge Herald* they wrote about the democratic decline. There is no democracy where there is no accountability of elected representatives and the protection of what should be constitutional rights. Dar Heatherington and David Emerson, just to name two who have escaped accountability for their actions in the face of public outrage. Since 1994 B.C. has legislated recall, citizens' initiative, and fixed election dates. My question for the Premier: will he protect the future of Alberta and our property by entrenching property rights into an Alberta Constitution?

Mr. Klein: I don't know what the hon. member means by entrenching property rights in the Constitution. Mr. Speaker, I think that it goes without saying that people have a right to own and ensure the privacy of their property. I think that that is enshrined in law, but I would have to check.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It isn't as far as I'm aware.

Will the Premier level the playing field for the next provincial election – and I don't mean the PC leadership election – by setting fixed election dates?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I have no problems. It's a matter that hasn't been discussed by my caucus, but I've often said that for every upside there's a downside, that for every action there's an equal and opposite and mostly negative reaction, and that applies to many of the suggestions that come from the Liberals and the NDs. They all say: "Why don't you do this, and why don't you do that? Why don't you do the other thing?" But what we like to do in our caucus is do a reasonable assessment of any proposal and find out what the downsides are. You know, they don't recognize the downside. All they do is say, "Oh, this is an idea; accept it," without doing an assessment of the downside. I'm a firm believer in the law

that prescribes that for every action there is an equal and opposite and mostly negative reaction.

2:00

Mr. Hinman: I'm looking forward to hearing the downside.

Mr. Speaker, my final question to the Premier: will he empower the people with the ability to say no way to the third way by putting people first and passing legislation for recall before passing third-way health legislation?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, the other way is about achieving sustainability in health care; in other words, about bringing the costs of health care in line with the rate of inflation. But if the hon. member considers it appropriate that there will be no money to spend on anything else by the year 2025 if health care costs continue to climb the way they are, if he thinks that that is okay, let him stand up and say so, and let the NDs stand up and say so, too, if they think it's okay. All we want to do is bring it back in line with the rate of inflation and improve accessibility.

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

West Fraser Timber Co. Ltd.

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday West Fraser Timber announced that it's closing down one of the two of its pulp lines at Hinton Pulp. With the loss of 100 jobs, my question is to the Acting Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Is this a sign of trouble for the pulp industry in Alberta?

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We know that the North American pulp industry faces uncertain times due to certain global pressures, and Alberta, of course, is not immune to this. However, West Fraser is not in fact shutting down its entire operation as pulp mills in other parts of the country are. In fact, West Fraser is investing, investing \$20 million to upgrade the mill to be more competitive in the long term in that particular industry. That is an investment in the future for the forest industry in Hinton and, of course, other parts of Alberta also.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first and only supplementary question is to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. What resources are being made available to the 100 Hinton employees whose jobs will be lost as a result of this pulp line closure?

Mr. Cardinal: Mr. Speaker, as in my earlier answers to questions from the opposition we already spend around \$288 million or so specifically to deal with situations of this nature. In fact, my staff has already contacted West Fraser officials to look at where we may provide additional services for the employees that may need some transitional support, including job and career counselling, resumé writing, job search assistance, and other transitional supports for people who need to move to new locations either in Alberta or in Canada or in within their community. Also, it just happens that there is a job fair in Hinton and Edson tomorrow that the employers have requested and will participate in.

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

Telemarketing Investigation

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are by nature very generous people who are willing to offer their support for noble causes. Unfortunately, recent reports suggest that an Alberta-based private, for-profit fundraising company, Xentel, may be preying upon the generosity of Albertans, using unethical business practices. Government Services is currently conducting an investigation into these alleged abuses. My questions are all to the Minister of Government Services. Will the minister publicly release or table the findings of the investigation into Xentel's telemarketing practices?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, it is true that we are investigating the whole incident. What we know so far, of course, is that there was a charity donation made to two organizations from this fundraising activity, but we are making sure that there's not misrepresentation to people that may have contributed. So, yes, we will release all of the information from our investigation once it's complete.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that Xentel records all of its telephone solicitations, will this government order these recordings to be made public to those Albertans who believe they were ripped off?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure that we have the authority to require those taped recordings to be made public. It's a private company that talked to individuals. Whether we can force them to make those public I'm not sure, but of course our investigators have the ability to listen to the tapes and make sure that there wasn't any misrepresentation.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that after receiving much criticism Xentel has promised to make its complete solicitation script available and has thus far failed to do so, will the minister commit to tabling the script once he gets it?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, in our role in the investigation we will make public our findings. Whether we can actually go beyond that and require that is speculative. I'm not sure that we have the legal authority to do it.

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

Avian Influenza

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Experts have recently predicted that a deadly strain of avian influenza virus may be coming to North America via the conduit of wild birds which are migrating between Asia and this continent. They say that it's not a question of if but when the pandemic will hit here in Alberta. My question is for the Minister of Health and Wellness. Can the minister advise the House whether Alberta is fully prepared to deal with the risk of a pandemic influenza striking Alberta?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, along with Health and the Department of Municipal Affairs, that minister, and the Solicitor General and the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development many ministries are involved. I am satisfied that every day we become more fully prepared. Let me start by saying that avian flu is not

necessarily pandemic influenza. If the avian flu migrates from birds to human beings and it then becomes an influenza and could certainly become a pandemic influenza, that is one of our major concerns.

Mr. Speaker, government officials, people, scientists working in laboratories have been readying themselves by looking at how the more recent strains of avian flu might transmit. Our medical officers of health are liaising with government officials, municipal officials. We have doses of Tamiflu for some 260,000 of the most seriously ill Albertans and front-line care workers.

Mr. Speaker, I think that at such time when it comes – and hopefully it won't come to Canada or to Alberta – then we are as prepared today as we can be given the nature of this particular flu, where we're not quite sure whether this virus is the one that either Tamiflu would protect us from or some of the other, more recent developments that we're working on.

Dr. Brown: To the same minister: has the government formulated a plan to educate Martha and Henry on how to prepare for the possible influenza outbreak?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, a lot of that work is going on now not only with the chambers of commerce but by, for example, medical officers of health in the regions, who are educating local businesses, making sure in schools of the programs that encourage people on how they should behave if they've got the flu or to stay home when they're sick, to cover their mouths, and so on. Also, recently a wonderful session held by Capital health, the second of which I know we've had in the last several months, invited many of the scientists – Dr. Louis Francescutti, Dr. Mark Joffe – and talked about a plan to cope with a pandemic, reminding people how staff should be treated, how they should be talked to about if they stay home the day they're sick, reminding people about the various things they should do to keep their workforce healthy and sustainable.

So, Mr. Speaker, I'm satisfied that as far as we have gone, the planning is in place, but we're doing more due diligence. I know that other ministries are looking, with me, at tabletop exercises to be sure that the plans are active and working.

2:10

Dr. Brown: My final supplementary is for the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. Has the government instituted any programs to specifically educate and protect individuals who may be exposed to the avian flu virus through exposure to domestic poultry or wild birds?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The key to biosecurity and protecting the poultry from avian influenza, or bird flu, is education and preparedness. We've been working with the industry for a number of years, actually, on biosecurity measures and a plan to deal with an outbreak of a disease like AI. We've actually been taking the lead in Canada in terms of preparedness and developing the plan to minimize the risk and spread of any kind of disease; in this case, it would be AI. We have an upcoming campaign to educate owners of backyard bird flocks because we view that as an area which may have some risk to it. We want to reduce the risk of domestic birds coming into contact with wild birds as much as we possibly can. To that end, in answer to the member's question we are definitely on an education track right now.

Water Quality of Lesser Slave Lake

Mr. Bonko: Mr. Speaker, Lesser Slave Lake is the region's most prominent natural asset. It's now suffering from the combined stress of forestry, agriculture, and recreation. The government has the ability to ensure that the lake remains in its pristine condition; however, they have failed to take action to steward this prestigious area. To the Minister of Environment: can the minister assure local residents that runoff from confined feedlot operations and local septic fields will not enter the lake?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, I can assure the hon. member and all members of this House and all Albertans that we will do everything in our power to ensure the protection of this lake that the hon. member has mentioned and that I know the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake has recognized. We will do that. Yes, we will.

Mr. Bonko: Given a lack of trust in provincial government, will the minister empower local communities to engage in community-based water quality monitoring?

Mr. Boutilier: I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker, but with all the boos I didn't hear the question. So I'm sorry; I'd have to ask the hon. member to repeat the question.

The Speaker: That's not exactly how it works, hon. minister.

Mr. Bonko: To the minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development: given that residents told us that they have no faith in the NRCB's ability to address environmental impacts of expanding confined feedlot operations on the lakeshore, will they review the AOPA legislation and ensure that no raw sewage ends up in the lake?

Mr. Horner: Actually, Mr. Speaker, we've been doing an ongoing review of the procedures involved in the NRCB's application of AOPA. Agriculture has been working on extension programs with producers. We believe that we have the best legislation in the country as it relates to intensive livestock operations. In fact, other provinces are looking to us to develop their own legislation because urban and rural communities need to coexist, and intensive livestock operations are a fact in agriculture. It's part of our value chain. It's part of how agriculture will grow in the future. We're very good at what we do, and we're very good stewards of the environment.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Seizure of Vehicles in Prostitution-related Offences

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year our Legislature passed Bill 39, the Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2005, including an amendment to Bill 206, Traffic Safety (Seizure of Vehicles in Prostitution Related Offences) Amendment Act, 2003, which allowed law enforcement to seize vehicles in prostitution-related activity. On behalf of my constituents I thank the minister and all the members who voted for it. My main question today is to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. My constituents are impatient after three years. Can the minister give the Assembly and constituents of mine an update on how long they have to wait before the law comes into effect?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As the hon. member knows and I'm sure the Assembly knows, the law was originally passed in the spring of 2003. At that particular point in time we felt that there had to be some amendments, and those amendments were subsequently brought forward in May of 2005. Since that time, we've been dealing with the regulations, and the regulations have been around issues of essentially what to do with the car once it is seized. We have worked all of those out, Mr. Speaker, and we will be in a position within the next month or so, later on this spring, to make the announcement that this law will be taking effect, and this law will allow the cars of johns to be seized in the hon. member's neighbourhood.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental question is to the Solicitor General, who is responsible for law enforcement. Given that three years ago as the private Member for Calgary-Buffalo he brought in the bill – and I commend him for that and support him on that – can the Solicitor General tell us when law enforcement can start seizing those vehicles?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We anticipate this law to become an important tool for the law enforcement community once it does come into being. We will continue to work with Alberta Infrastructure and Transportation regarding this. As soon as the regulations are complete, police will have this additional tool, as I mentioned, and the authority to seize vehicles. We always have to support the public, whether regarding the efforts to stop those people who have disregard for residential communities or regarding the safety within these communities, whether it's drugs and alcohol or whether it's physical assaults or needles and condoms.

We also have to remember, Mr. Speaker, that enforcement is just one side of this issue. We need to ensure that there are also adequate programs in place to allow these young women to safely be removed from the streets to transition themselves away from being involved in the sex trade industry and, as well, so that they can get the help and support they need.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last supplemental question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Given that my constituents complain to me about the lack of city bylaws in Calgary that can be developed to control prostitution, such as prohibiting the sex trade near schools and residential areas, what can the minister do to encourage the city of Calgary to develop such municipal bylaws?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. At the outset let me say that Municipal Affairs certainly is supportive of any municipality's initiatives to establish bylaws that will result in creating safer and more viable communities. At the same time I need to point out that while the Municipal Government Act is enabling in nature and will allow for bylaws respecting the safety, health, and welfare of people and the protection of people and property and respecting people, activities, and things in, on, or near a public place or place that is open to the public, the municipal powers do not extend to areas of

jurisdiction that include the control of activities that fall under the federal Criminal Code.

So creating bylaws that will accomplish what the member is seeking is a little bit tricky and does require some creativity on the part of the municipality. To that extent, Mr. Speaker, I understand that initiatives such as this are being discussed and sponsored by an organization by the name of the Community Life Improvement Council as well as the Canada West Foundation. In fact, a workshop is being held in Calgary on April 4, 5, and 6, and they will be dealing at that workshop with issues such as safe streets, safe cities, and seeking solutions. I hope that they're able to come up with those creative concepts that bylaws can work.

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

First Contract Labour Arbitration

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta has the worst labour laws in the country as far as workers are concerned. The province, frankly, is a haven for unscrupulous employers, who often treat their workers as second-class citizens. Tyson Foods is a case in point. After the ugly labour dispute in Brooks last fall the government indicated that they were prepared to look at first contract arbitration. To the Minister of Human Resources and Employment: can the minister tell us when he's going to do the right thing and bring in first contract arbitration?

2:20

Mr. Cardinal: Mr. Speaker, like the Liberals, only the NDs would find something negative about too many jobs in Alberta and such a strong economy, but we'll have to live with that. That's why they're the opposition.

I just want to tell you, Mr. Speaker, that the labour laws in Alberta are probably the best in North America.

An Hon. Member: Probably in the universe.

Mr. Cardinal: Maybe the universe even, Mr. Speaker. They are the best.

Presently in Alberta with such a strong economy, so many jobs out there, many industries are moving to Alberta to set up purposely because Alberta's environment as far as the labour situation is really good. In fact, over 99 per cent of all collective agreements – that's 1,200 collective agreements – are in place and approved without any disruption at all.

Mr. Martin: No doubt the best labour laws in the country for people like Tyson. No doubt about it.

My question. The minister avoided it, so I'm going to ask again: what is it going to take for the government to move on first contract arbitration? Another dispute? Violence? Somebody getting killed? Is that what it's going to take?

Mr. Cardinal: Mr. Speaker, this particular issue is under discussion right now, and of course the member knows that any issue that is under discussion in caucus is not discussed in the House until a final decision is made.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, that's absolute nonsense. The minister said before that he was looking at first contract arbitration. It's not for discussion behind closed doors by this government. My question again: when is the minister going to do the right thing and move on

first contract arbitration? This year, next year, or in a hundred years?

Mr. Cardinal: Mr. Speaker, of course this member knows that anything that's under discussion by our government is not shared in public until a final decision is made. Stay tuned.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

Shared Responsibility for Seniors' Programs

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Continuing care health services have been separated from housing. This leaves the public uncertain of where to go for help and unable to identify who is ultimately responsible. It is confusing, inefficient, and an ineffective approach. We need to establish a system with clear lines of responsibility and accountability. To the minister of seniors: given that the minister indicated on Monday that she has a new concerns resolution process for continuing care in mind, would the minister describe this new process?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to comment that the responsibility for continuing care is shared between the Minister of Health and Wellness and myself, but that responsibility is actually working very, very well. The area for accommodation and for housing that was mentioned here, the concerns resolution process as far as the standards related to accommodation in my ministry, what that would relate to is this: as we updated the standards through the MLA task force, one of the areas that we thought would bring immediacy to change and to help people in care if they did have a complaint was that that would be reported, it would be monitored, and it would be enforced. That would occur through a concerns resolution process. The concerns resolution process, for example, under accommodation would mean that if somebody had a concern about food, which many of the complaints in care to my ministry are about, then the staff would record that. They would report on it. That's what it's about, to actually resolve that for the individual and for the family, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Premier said last fall that consolidating seniors' programs and services is under active consideration, can the minister explain how this plan has gone forward or is being implemented?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the shared responsibility, especially in the area that's related to standards, which I know the member is very familiar with, where this is coming together for supportive living and for long-term care is that areas such as designated assisted living and the long-term care are under the regional health authorities, whereas lodges and assisted living are within my ministry. But where it comes together is with the funding that we allocate to both.

I don't know if that assists you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. My next question would be to the Minister of RAGE. Has the minister assessed the efficiency or not of having seniors' care, housing, and programs divided between multiple ministries?

Mr. Ouellette: No, Mr. Speaker, I haven't. Thank you.

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

Railway Transportation in Northern Alberta

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Canadian National Railway recently announced the acquisition of the Mackenzie Northern rail line, running from Smith, Alberta, to Hay River, Northwest Territories. CN's \$40 million investment will see upgrades of the line, increasing train velocities, expediting train shipments. The development of the container handling facility in Prince Rupert is also becoming a reality, with potential long-term benefits for northern Alberta. To the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation: what are the implications of this new project on northern Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The short answer to this question is that this project obviously is going to have wonderful implications for northern Alberta. The port of Prince Rupert is looking at having roughly 500,000 containers per year once phase 1 of the project is done. Again, this is probably the third or fourth time this session that I'm in a little bit of an uncomfortable position, and that is that I'm actually going to congratulate the previous federal government for the Pacific gateway strategy. This is a strategy that yesterday I reconfirmed with the new minister of infrastructure and transportation in Ottawa. This is a very important strategy both for northern Alberta as well as Alberta in general as well as the Pacific gateway to expand our export markets, to expand our export capability. Quite simply, this is wonderful news for northern Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is also to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. The north still lacks a connection to the west coast because of the removal of the Watino rail line. Does the minister see a role for the provincial government in supporting rail infrastructure and development?

Dr. Oberg: Mr. Speaker, that's a very interesting question. Prior to CN taking over the short-line railroads, which were under provincial jurisdiction, there was an element of potentially helping the short-line railroads. I find it very difficult to attempt to help an organization or a company that is making 31 per cent profit, which is what CN is presently making. I believe the figures are very close to that. So this is very much an enigma. We don't necessarily want to enter into the market to be helping one particular company versus the other company. On the other hand, we do want to ensure that there is mobility, that there is a rail transportation in northern Alberta. Obviously, we are looking very closely at this decision. We are looking very closely at whether or not we do become involved in this, but we have to be careful because we simply don't want to be seen as subsidizing one company over another.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I understand the dilemma that the minister has. Still, looking at it from the northern Alberta perspective, can he please tell me how we can take advantage of an infrastructure without having part of it there?

Dr. Oberg: Well, Mr. Speaker, one of the things that we've done, obviously, is the northern road strategy, which the hon. member has been intimately involved in, and another thing that we've done is provide land for the intermodal port that the county of Grande Prairie is presently doing. So we're there to do whatever we can from an infrastructure and transportation point of view to ensure that the goods and services move and that the supply chain is very effective from northern Alberta right out to the port. We will do whatever it takes. We have to get over this issue about subsidizing one company versus the other. That's a very large philosophical dilemma that we're in in this particular situation. It was actually much easier when the short-line railroads were under provincial jurisdiction as opposed to the large railroads, which are under federal jurisdiction.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Strathcona.

Sports and Fitness Strategy

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. An active lifestyle is an important and effective way to maintain good health. By promoting sports and recreation, this government can contribute to a healthier population and decrease the cost of public health care. My first question is to the Minister of Community Development. Does the minister agree that fully implementing the Alberta sports plan would help to reduce the cost of public health care by promoting a healthier population?

2:30

Mr. Mar: The short answer is yes, Mr. Speaker. I think the longer answer, though, is that the Alberta government through Community Development has had a long history of promoting sports at both the recreational and competitive levels. One can see the results of the recent winter Olympics, that were held in Torino, Italy. One can see the number of athletes that train right here in the province of Alberta that are members of Canada's Olympic team. One looks at success that we've had in World Cup events in skiing, cross-country, and downhill.

I would invite the hon. member to also see the level of participation at games like the Alberta Winter Games, that were recently hosted up in the Hinton area, where it was an extraordinary result, where some 2,200 athletes from throughout the province descended upon Hinton and the surrounding area and participated greatly.

So, Mr. Speaker, we do recognize this. The sports plan would certainly be an excellent adjunct to supporting what we already do, but we already do a great job, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Agnihotri: To the same minister: has the minister taken part in the third-way consultation to advocate for a fully implemented Alberta sports plan?

Mr. Mar: Mr. Speaker, certainly I have advocated for the implementation of the Alberta sport plan, but again I want to emphasize that participation of young people in athletic endeavours is very, very important. This is something that the Minister of Education certainly is aware of. Anybody who's been a Minister of Commu-

nity Development in the past knows that kids that are part of a team are not part of a gang. Kids that are slinging around a tennis racket are not slinging around a firearm. Kids that are high on their achievement are not high on drugs. We recognize intuitively and statistically the value of participation in the arts, in culture, in sport, in recreation, and this has been a very important part of the emphasis of the Department of Community Development.

Mr. Agnihotri: To the Minister of Health and Wellness: has your department conducted any studies to determine the financial impact an Alberta sports plan would have on health care costs?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I can't speak with any knowledge about studies in the past, but I would tell you that a very effective program started by my predecessor, the Choose Well Challenge and the Healthy U program, seems to be having a tremendous amount of benefit in communities. A number of communities participated last year. We had 62 communities. We expect to have even more communities involved this year. If there are studies or data that I can provide for the hon. member, I will search that out and see if we can provide them.

The Speaker: Hon. members, in a few seconds I will call on the first of a number to participate but first of all our historical vignette of the day.

Vignettes from the Assembly's History

The Speaker: As of June 1, 1972, the Legislative Assembly Act addressed the actual tenure of the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition. Since that time the leader was the leader on a full-time basis, unlike the practice which existed from 1906 to 1971.

Former Premier Harry Strom, Social Credit representing the constituency of Cypress, served in 1972. In 1973 James D. Henderson, Social Credit representing Wetaskiwin-Leduc, served for a brief period before Robert C. Clark, Social Credit representing Olds-Didsbury was elected leader. Mr. Clark served as Leader of the Official Opposition from 1973 to 1980. In 1980 Raymond A. Speaker, Social Credit representing Little Bow, became the leader and served to 1982.

Grant Notley, New Democratic Party representing the constituency of Spirit River-Fairview, served as the opposition leader in 1983 and 1984. Following Mr. Notley's untimely death, the current member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, a member of the New Democratic Party representing the constituency of Edmonton-Norwood, assumed the position and served from 1984 to 1993.

Laurence Decore, a Liberal representing Edmonton-Glengarry, served in 1993 and 1994, when D. Grant Mitchell became the new Liberal leader. Mr. Mitchell served as Leader of the Official Opposition from 1994 to 1998. From July 7, 1998, to March 12, 2001, Nancy J. MacBeth, a Liberal representing the constituency of Edmonton-McClung, served as the leader. In 2001 Dr. Ken Nicol, a Liberal representing Lethbridge-East, became the leader and served in that capacity to March 27, 2004, when the current member for Edmonton-Riverview, a Liberal, assumed the position.

Alberta has had 28 different leaders of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, 16 Lieutenant Governors, and 12 Premiers. While one, E. Peter Lougheed, was to be elected Premier of the province of Alberta in Alberta's first 100 years, four were to become Lieutenant Governors of Alberta, and that will be a subject of another vignette.

head:

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Alberta Association for Community Living

Mr. Lougheed: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past weekend I had the opportunity to attend the Alberta Association for Community Living's 50th anniversary celebration and annual family conference here in Edmonton. AACL is a family-based, not-for-profit organization that represents the interests of children and adults with developmental disabilities and their families. This organization believes in the importance of supportive, loving families and fully inclusive communities.

It strives to assist children and adults with developmental disabilities and to provide opportunity for them to grow up in supportive and understanding families, have a home in the community, and develop and strengthen the family relationships and friendships in their lives. The AACL provides supports to increase the opportunities for persons with developmental disabilities to be educated in inclusive classrooms, find and maintain meaningful employment, and develop other life skills that will help them be valued members of their communities.

As chair of the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities, I would like to recognize the work of the AACL and the positive impact it has made in the lives of Albertans with developmental disabilities and their families. Congratulations to the Alberta Association for Community Living for 50 successful years.

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

Challenge North 2006 Conference

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to rise today to draw attention to northern Alberta. Northern Alberta makes a significant contribution to Alberta's economy and the quality of life all Albertans enjoy, but it is only beginning to capture its full potential.

Much of the northern economy is based on resource extraction; however, the long-term sustainability of northern Alberta communities depends on adding value to our resources and achieving a high quality of life for northern residents. While many communities in the north are experiencing unprecedented growth, others are experiencing difficulties adapting to changes taking place in northern and rural economies.

Next month the Northern Alberta Development Council is hosting Challenge North 2006: Today's Promise, Tomorrow's Reality, a conference that brings together northern leaders to identify strategies to guide the development of their own communities and the region as a whole. Infrastructure, human resources, education, and housing are just some of the northern priorities to be discussed at this conference.

As a government we must make a commitment to provide the opportunity for these Albertans to build vibrant communities and economies through co-operation, innovation, and diversification.

I would like to take this opportunity to welcome all members to attend this important conference in High Level and to take a tour of the area. I look forward to being part of the process as we move forward as a whole province to ensure that northern Alberta is not overlooked and receives the investment and support it needs to grow in the future.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

2:40

Catherine Druhall

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise in sorrow

this afternoon to pay homage to a constituent of mine whose funeral I recently attended. Mrs. Catherine Druhall first contacted my constituency office almost exactly one year ago. She came to seek help because she was fearful for the health and safety of her husband, John, who is a resident of a long-term care facility in Calgary. When she met with my assistant, she had books, binders, and boxes of documentation she had made documenting the poor level of care her husband was receiving and the times he needed acute care as a result.

Catherine spent time with her husband nearly every day until she could no longer walk, just one month ago. She spent time with him so often not only because she was a loving, dedicated woman but also because she was terrified of what might happen to him when she was not there. Catherine used every government process to try and get help. She received at best lip service and at worst outright intimidation. Catherine said one day: "We have always worked hard. We never cheated. We lived our lives with dignity, and my husband deserves to live out his last years in dignity and to die with dignity."

Catherine did live her last years with dignity, and she did die with dignity, because and perhaps only because she did not have to depend on long-term care in this province. Catherine prayed that after the Auditor General's report of last spring and the MLA commission report of last fall she might see positive change. Instead, this honest, hardworking, and caring senior died in fear of what would happen to John now.

Thank you, Catherine Druhall. Women like you created the opportunities that we enjoy today. In return, you and other seniors have been treated with disregard and disdain by this government.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Telus University Cup

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize some of the best hockey being played in our province, indeed our country. Now, to be clear, I'm not referring to the Edmonton Oilers or the Calgary Flames. The University of Alberta is hosting the Telus University Cup. This tournament features the top six university men's teams from across Canada. Over 200 athletes, coaches, and staff will compete for the national title from March 23 to 26 in Edmonton. The defending champion U of A Golden Bears will host Lakehead University of Thunder Bay, Acadia University of Wolfville, Nova Scotia, the University of Saskatchewan, McGill University of Montreal, and Wilfrid Laurier of Waterloo, Ontario.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to encourage everyone to take in some of this competition and experience exceptional hockey and possibly discover some future NHL talent. I would encourage all members of the House to join me in congratulating the organizers, sponsors, and athletes and in wishing them well over the next three days.

Thank you.

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

World Water Day

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today is World Water Day. Water is so fundamental to life that it is often taken for granted, yet lack of water and unsafe water is a threat to life in many countries of the world. Rural Albertans close to their source of water and intimately involved with its uses are most conscious of how vital to life, livelihood, and the precious ecosystems it is. They, among others, are increasingly anxious about the present administration of this resource and are concerned about this when most of the water is

invisible. Weak systems of monitoring and enforcement continue to take their toll and affect 20 per cent of our Alberta population.

The Alberta government has stated in its Water for Life strategy of three years ago that groundwater and surface water must be preserved in pursuing community and economic development, but evidence of this is wanting. Our water is declining in quantity and quality. Industrial expansion is predicted to consume more water than agriculture this decade. In the case of oil and gas, activity has the potential to both contaminate underground aquifers and contribute to loss in deeper zones, where higher mineral content can make it unpotable. This is of particular concern in recent unconventional CBM activity burgeoning across the province.

What is the volume and quality of our groundwater? We don't know, yet government refuses to slow the pace of industrial development until we know. We must manage surface activities to protect this vital resource and move to full-cost accounting to ensure that industry and the public treat water conservatively and sustainably.

The Water for Life strategy remains largely a vision without major new investments and baseline measures and new regulations. Albertans have identified the environment as a close third in priority, yet it receives only 0.5 per cent of the provincial budget. Alberta is caught in a frenzy of industrial activity, population growth, and climate change that could leave future generations with a starkly different environment and an economy hampered by a shortage of water. We cannot be complacent about our lifeblood. We need leadership for smart growth. Government must take control of the profound industrial pressures on surface and subsurface water and balance them with ecological and human needs.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

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 present a petition representing a hundred residents of Alberta from the communities of Sherwood Park, Edmonton, St. Albert, Fort Saskatchewan, Red Deer, Delburne, and Calgary expressing their concern about the proposed changes to the health care system.

Thank you.

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to submit a petition with 51 names: "We, the undersigned . . . petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to consider increasing funding in order that all Alberta Works income support benefit levels may be increased."

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three sets of tablings with regard to the provincial government's plan for the future of daycare. The e-mailers and letter writers are as follows: Christine Dober-Miller, David Langdon, Kim Tufford, Billy-Jo Schmidt, Dena Gillies, Katya Pekh, Sergei Pekh, Dawn Laprise, Barbara Brochu, Arlene Thompson, Sandra Krasowski, Peggy Flesher, C. Moorey, Eugenia Alcasabas, J. Oliver, Rakesh Kapoor, and Kaya Frayn.*

Thank you.

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

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have copies of six letters regarding the provincial government's involvement with the national daycare program. These letters are from Linda Bourassa, Sandy Bowhay, Peter Adams,* Stacey Wickman, William Fedorak, and Ron Wickman.

Thank you.

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

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, am pleased to table six letters and the appropriate copies regarding the provincial government's plan for the future of daycare. These letters are signed by Gladys Wrynn, Ed Wrynn, R.J. Grant, Peggy Ziebarth, Samantha Pekh, and Maxine Howard.

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

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings. The first is a letter requesting support for adequate funding for the Persons with Developmental Disabilities Edmonton Region Community Board to support individuals with developmental disabilities and their families. This is from Jan Ardis.

My second tabling is five letters with appropriate copies regarding the provincial government's plan for the future of daycare. The letters I am tabling today are from Dawn Schroeder, Kim Tufford, Teena Wilks, Ronald Pasnak, and Joyce Assen.

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do have the appropriate number of copies of a letter from Carolyn Pogue calling on the government to reject the privatization of the health care system.

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

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

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

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the hon. members of the Assembly my special guests from the outstanding Ernest Morrow junior high school, located in the hard-working community of Forest Lawn in my excellent Calgary-Fort constituency. I must point out that the better half of the Member for Foothills-Rocky View is a dedicated teacher at this school. There are 35 hard-working students here today accompanied by five dedicated group leaders and teachers: Shannon Donnelly, Marilyn Russel, Verna Oystreck, Darren Kiziak, and Diane Pham. I would like to ask all of them to stand and receive the traditional welcome of the Assembly.

2:50

The Speaker: With a great deal of trepidation, the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is again indeed a pleasure and an honour to introduce to you and through you

*This spelling could not be verified at the time of publication.

to members of this Assembly two young Albertans from the constituency of Lac La Biche-St. Paul. Joining us for the budget are Graham Beaulieu and my youngest son, George Danyluk. Graham and George are both in their third year of mechanical engineering at the University of Alberta. Both of them will be working with Nexum this summer, Graham in Lloydminster and George in Fort McMurray. They are seated in the members' gallery this afternoon. I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. members, in order to adequately prepare for the Budget Address by the Minister of Finance, the House is recessed until 3:30 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned from 2:51 p.m. to 3:30 p.m.]

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Transmittal of Estimates**

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mrs. McClellan: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I have received certain messages from His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, which I now transmit to you.

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order!

The Speaker: Hon. members, the Lieutenant Governor transmits estimates of certain sums required by the offices of the Legislative Assembly for the service of the province for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2007, and recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly.

The Lieutenant Governor transmits estimates of certain sums required by the government for the service of the province for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2007, and recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly.

Please be seated.

head: **Government Motions**

15. Mrs. McClellan moved:

Be it resolved that the messages from His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, the 2006-07 offices of the Legislative Assembly estimates, the 2006-07 government estimates, fiscal and business plans, and all matters connected therewith be referred to Committee of Supply.

[Government Motion 15 carried]

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, prior to moving Government Motion 16, I now wish to table the 2006-07 offices of the Legislative Assembly estimates as well as the 2006-07 government estimates.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, I am tabling the government's consolidated fiscal, capital, and business plans for Budget 2006 as required under sections 4, 7, and 7(1) of the Government Accountability Act.

Also provided for the information of the Legislative Assembly are business plans for each ministry, which must be made public under section 13 of the same act.

head: **Budget Address**

16. Mrs. McClellan moved:

Be it resolved that the Assembly approve in general the business plans and fiscal policies of the government.

Mrs. McClellan: As a proud Albertan it is my honour and privilege to rise today and present Alberta's budget for 2006, the first year of our second century. Mr. Speaker, 2005 was a special year for Alberta. We celebrated 100 years as a member of Canada's Confederation. Just last week we celebrated the 100th anniversary of the Alberta Legislature. Alberta has come a long way from that first legislative session, held in the Thistle Roller and Ice Rink, just a few blocks from where we sit today. Together Albertans have built a province that's gone from a remote wilderness with great promise to an economic powerhouse with tremendous achievements and boundless opportunities.

Alberta has always been a place for optimists. People like Karl Clark, who pioneered Alberta's oil sands discoveries back in the 1920s and refused to give up on his dreams. Karl Clark would be amazed at what's happening today. People like Dr. James Shapiro and his team at the University of Alberta, whose Edmonton protocol is giving new hope to millions of people with diabetes. People like our former Lieutenant Governor Lois Hole, whose passion for education and for life inspired us all. People like Arno, Steve, Glenn, Terry, Darcy, Rick, Tony, and, oh, so many others, who refused to give up when BSE turned their lives and their livestock businesses upside down. And people like our Premier, who has always believed in Alberta and Albertans, who believed that we could be the first and only province in Canada to be debt free and kept us firmly on track till that goal was achieved.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta's history is defined by optimists, and if there was ever a time for optimism about Alberta and about our future, this is it. We enter our second century in a truly remarkable position. Our economy is leading the country. More people are working and earning more than ever before. Our education system is among the best in the world. Our colleges, universities, and technical schools are producing outstanding graduates, leading researchers, and thoughtful young people who will lead our province in years to come.

Leading businesses and entrepreneurs see Alberta as the place to achieve their dreams. Across the province there's a feeling that this is Alberta; the sky is the limit. Our challenge, Mr. Speaker, is to channel Albertans' optimism, their energy, and their ideas to take the best advantage of today's prosperity and secure an even better future for our province.

In a nutshell, that's what Alberta's budget for 2006 is designed to achieve. It's about strengthening today and securing tomorrow. It's about seizing today's opportunities and investing wisely to meet today's challenges. But most of all it's about keeping our eyes firmly on Alberta's future and making sure that everything we do today, every investment that we make helps build a better future for our children and their children.

Mr. Speaker, Budget 2006 is Alberta's 13th consecutive balanced budget. It positions Alberta for continued growth and prosperity. It strengthens our position today, ensuring businesses can compete, communities can thrive, and Albertans can succeed. It invests in priority areas, saves for the future, and gives back to Albertans, keeping our taxes the lowest in Canada and helping people who need our support. Before I get into some of the details, Mr. Speaker, let me begin with the big picture.

For 2006-07 our budget projects a surplus of just over \$4 billion. That surplus is largely due to continuing high prices for oil and gas. I'll tell you right now that the surplus could be more if prices are higher than we anticipate, and it could be less if prices drop. That's the reality that we live with in Alberta, and like every Finance minister under our Premier's leadership I would rather be pleasantly surprised with higher-than-expected prices than be forced to cut back if prices drop.

This year's surplus will be earmarked to three key priorities: saving for Alberta's future, responding to capital and infrastructure needs, and increasing the sustainability fund to provide added protection against any sudden declines in revenues and to respond to emergencies throughout the year.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to announce today that an additional \$1 billion will be invested in the heritage fund in 2006. That's in addition to the \$1 billion we invested earlier this year and our ongoing commitment to inflation-proof the fund. It's a direct reflection of our government's commitment to use Alberta's abundance of resource revenues not only to meet the challenges of today but to share that legacy with future generations of Albertans.

This year our government's base operating spending will increase by 8.3 per cent. As Alberta's Finance minister my focus never strays far from the bottom line. I'll be honest and say that I wish spending was lower, but I believe this is responsible spending for this year, and I am confident that we're making the right investments today to secure a better future for our province.

At the same time, I will also give fair warning to Albertans and to those who think that there's no end to how much we can spend. Do not expect this rate of spending to continue in years to come. We have learned the lessons from Alberta's past. We will not squander Alberta's future security by spending more than we can afford, and we will not spend money today, then pass on the bills to future generations of Albertans. Not on our government's watch. This year, Mr. Speaker, we will also review our fiscal framework to make sure that it continues to serve Alberta's needs now and into the future.

Now, Mr. Speaker, let me talk about some of the details in our budget for 2006-07. This budget invests in five key areas: in infrastructure; in people; in communities, both rural and urban; in Alberta's environment; and in sustaining economic prosperity.

Over the next three years our government will support \$13.3 billion in infrastructure and important capital projects. That's a 45 per cent increase over our previous capital plan. It's a level of spending that is unmatched in Canada. In fact, on a per capita basis we'll spend three times the average of other provinces.

Mr. Speaker, \$13 billion is a lot of money, but it's also a very critical investment in Alberta's future. It will continue our investments in new and revitalized schools across the province. It will open up new spaces at colleges, universities, and technical institutes and make sure that Alberta has the highly skilled workforce we need. It will improve Alberta's access to leading health care treatments, and it will make sure that we have safe and efficient roads and highways all across the province.

3:40

Let me give Albertans just a quick list of some of the projects that this \$13 billion investment will support: a new centennial centre for interdisciplinary science at the University of Alberta, the Campus Calgary digital library at the University of Calgary, the second phase of redevelopment of Bow Valley College, expansion of trades facilities at Red Deer College, the new Robbins health learning centre at Grant MacEwan College, expansion of Lakeland College in Lloydminster, a new water and environmental science building at the University of Lethbridge, and a new centre for apprenticeship training at NAIT.

In education, Mr. Speaker, 21 school capital projects will be completed this school year, opening up more than 7,300 spaces for kindergarten to grade 12 students across the province; 109 new modular classrooms will open up an additional 2,725 new spaces. Work will begin or continue on 51 previously announced school projects.

In health care, Mr. Speaker, our capital budget will support new

health facilities in Sherwood Park and Fort Saskatchewan; the new Sheldon M. Chumir health centre and the bone and joint institute in Calgary; expansion of the Rockyview, Foothills, and Peter Lougheed hospitals in Calgary; redevelopment of the Royal Alexandra hospital in Edmonton and hospitals in Lethbridge, Edson, Barrhead, Viking, and High Prairie. It will replace the Eastwood primary health centre in Edmonton. It will continue building the new south Calgary hospital and the health sciences ambulatory learning centre in Edmonton. It will complete the Mazankowski Alberta Heart Institute in Edmonton and move ahead with health information systems, including electronic health records.

On top of these projects, over \$3 billion will go to Alberta's municipalities over the next three years to support roads, bridges, public transit, water and waste water and other infrastructure initiatives in towns, cities, and villages across the province. We'll invest \$3.6 billion in Alberta's highway network, including critical work to begin twinning highway 63 to Fort McMurray, build ring roads around Edmonton and Calgary, and pave our high-volume gravel roads.

Mr. Speaker, this is a clear case of investing now, when we have the money, and putting our resource revenue to work for future generations of Albertans.

The second area I want to highlight today is our investment in people. Ask Albertans what they expect their government's priorities to be, and the answers are pretty clear: make sure our children get a good education, that there's a place for my son or daughter at Alberta's universities, colleges, or technical institutes; make sure I can get health care when I need it; and take care of Albertans who need our help, especially children and seniors. That's exactly what Budget 2006 is designed to do.

Total health spending will reach over \$10 billion this year. That includes a 7.5 per cent increase in operating spending and nearly \$700 million for health capital grants. Nearly two-thirds of operating spending will go to health regions to support everything from promoting good health to providing home care to running hospitals and transplanting hearts even in the tiniest babies. This year and for the next two years grants to health regions will increase by 6 per cent per year, giving them the certainty they need to plan and deliver health services to Albertans.

We'll follow through on Alberta's commitment to lead the rest of the country in cancer prevention through a combination of screening, research, and prevention. If Albertans like Dr. Tony Fields have their way, we'll prevent thousands of new cases of cancer, save lives, and maybe, Mr. Speaker, just maybe find a cure for cancer right here in Alberta.

We'll also take very important steps this year to build on our experience with the highly successful hip and knee replacement project and reduce waiting times for breast and prostate cancer care, coronary artery bypass surgery, MRIs, and CT scans.

By 2008-09 our annual operating spending on continuing care initiatives will have increased by \$127 million. That additional funding will result in more hours of nursing and personal care in long-term care facilities, better access to therapy, expanded staff training, and implementation of new health care standards. This is in addition to capital funding last year and this year which is being used to support 1,500 new rural supportive living units and upgrade close to 4,000 units in 77 seniors' lodges across the province.

Mr. Speaker, these are substantial investments in the future of Alberta's health care system. Over the past 10 years spending on health has grown by about an average of 10 per cent per year. This trend cannot continue, or we will have a health care system that we can only afford with \$60 oil and \$7 gas. If we keep spending like we have been over the last 10 years, we're betting the future of

Alberta's health care system on the price of oil and gas. That worries me, and it worries Albertans. Our government has launched a comprehensive discussion on what needs to be done to make sure that our health system is there when people need it and at a price Alberta taxpayers can afford. It's a debate that Albertans need to have, and it's a debate that will shape the future sustainability of health care in Alberta.

This budget also makes very significant investments in the education of our children and young people across the province. In 2006-07 our government will increase operating spending on basic education by over 5 per cent. Funding to school boards will also increase, including another \$16.6 million to reduce class sizes in Alberta schools, especially in the earlier grades. Increased funding will also support technology, transportation, student health, children with special needs, and students whose first language isn't English.

This year the Minister of Education will also launch a series of round-table discussions talking to students, parents, educators, business and community leaders to find the best ways to increase the number of young Albertans who complete high school. A high school completion symposium will also be convened to address these issues.

In 2005, Mr. Speaker, postsecondary education was our government's number one priority, and that was just the beginning. Our commitment to postsecondary education will be even stronger in 2006-07. Operating spending will increase by 16 per cent, and over \$270 million will be invested in capital projects at Alberta's universities, colleges, and technical institutes. By 2008-09 our government will have increased operating spending on postsecondary education by nearly 29 per cent and will have opened up 20,000 new learning opportunities for students across the province.

The first allocations will be made this year from the access to the future fund, providing support for up to \$45 million in projects at Alberta's postsecondary institutions, and as announced already, Alberta's postsecondary students will not pay \$1 more in tuition this year thanks to our government's promise to pick up the costs of tuition increases again this year. On top of that direct support for Alberta students, we will also increase funding for scholarships, bursaries, and grants by 21.5 per cent and increase the yearly loan limits to recognize rising costs for students.

Here are some of the other investments that we will make in Albertans, young and old, as part of Budget 2006. Support for the Alberta seniors' benefit will increase by over 8 per cent. Funding for AISH will increase by nearly 18 per cent. Money will be invested in affordable housing, and funding for children's programs will increase by over 12 per cent, providing additional funding for child care, for child intervention services, to support families of children with disabilities, and to step up our actions in preventing family violence and bullying.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans are fiercely proud of the communities where they live. They want their communities to be good places to raise their families and build their futures. There's no doubt that many rural communities have been under an enormous strain. While Alberta's cities have struggled to keep pace with a booming economy, rural communities faced the devastation of BSE. Albertans stood by farmers and ranchers when BSE and bad weather took their toll, but it's really the rural communities that face the hard repercussions right in their own backyards. They see the impact today whenever commodity prices rise or fall, and they watch their youth and young families leave for the cities in search of further education and better jobs.

3:50

In spite of that, Mr. Speaker, rural Alberta is a place for optimists,

for people who believe there's a future for rural Alberta and rural communities all across the province. I'm fiercely proud of my rural heritage. It's where I live. It's where my heart and soul will always be. I'm enormously proud of our government's commitment to rural communities, to their futures, and to the families who call rural Alberta home.

It gives me a great deal of pleasure to announce today that our government is committing \$100 million for a new rural development initiative. This initiative will support a number of projects and help us move forward with implementing our government's comprehensive rural development strategy. We're going to work with rural communities, expand and diversify the rural economy, improve services, and enhance the quality of life in small-town Alberta. Details of this new initiative are still being developed, so I can only say to people in rural Alberta: "Stay tuned. There's more good news to come."

Mr. Speaker, this budget will also provide ongoing support to communities all across the province, large and small, rural and urban. This year we'll increase our funding for provincial and municipal policing, step up our efforts to combat organized crime, take steps to address the serious problem of crystal meth, improve access to the justice system, and establish a new initiative to handle high-risk family violence cases.

We will also spend an additional \$7 million on provincial foundations: foundations for the arts, sports and recreation, parks and wildlife, human rights and multiculturalism, volunteerism, and historical resources.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans are proud of their communities and rightly so, but they're also fiercely proud and protective of our environment. They value Alberta's land and water, and they want to make sure that it's preserved for future generations. With this budget our government will add to its investment in the Water for Life strategy. Over the next three years \$172 million will be spent on municipal water and waste-water treatment facilities, on reducing the risk of flooding, and on testing and protecting Alberta's water supply. We'll invest \$15 million in a new initiative to develop a comprehensive land-use framework for Alberta, a framework that will guide future decisions on how Alberta's land is used, whether that's to preserve sensitive grasslands, to open up recreation areas, manage growth around our major cities, or preserve our valuable farmland.

Twelve million dollars will be spent this year on initiatives related to climate change, including major research initiatives through the Alberta Energy Research Institute.

Our Premier has joined with others in the industry to champion a new future for Alberta's vast supplies of coal. We've all heard his passion when he talks about clean coal, and he's working hard to turn the skeptics into believers. Just like with the skeptics who said that the oil sands would never be viable, we're going to prove that the naysayers are wrong.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta has coal reserves to last upwards of 1,000 years, and they contain some of the cleanest burning coal in the world. Alberta's coal contains twice the energy of Alberta's conventional crude, natural gas, and bitumen combined. Our challenge is this: to combine new technology with the ingenuity of Albertans to transform those vast reserves of coal into an affordable, reliable, and clean source of energy for the future.

Mr. Speaker, our Premier has said that a new day is dawning for coal, and it's dawning right here in Alberta. With our government's support the Alberta Energy Research Institute will partner with leading Alberta-based industries to develop clean-coal technology, technology designed to eliminate emissions and open the door to new, clean-burning alternatives to meet our growing energy demands. This is another area where Alberta optimists will lead the

way, and the result will be a cleaner environment, a long-term source of energy in Alberta, and a wealth of new opportunity to expand Alberta's economy and build for the future.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta's economy is stronger than ever, and all signs point to a continued strong growth in the near future. As one author put it, for the first time in our history Alberta is being widely emulated rather than casually dismissed. There is no doubt Alberta is the place to be, and there's no longer a chance that we can be dismissed. People are flocking here to get jobs and pursue their dreams. Businesses look to Alberta as the place to invest, pursue new opportunities, and build their futures.

Mr. Speaker, make no mistake. Alberta has to be able to compete not only with the rest of Canada but the rest of the world. To do that, it's not enough just to sell Alberta as a great place to be. We need to be competitive on taxes.

Our government will reduce the general corporate tax rate from 11.5 per cent to 10 per cent effective April 1, 2006. Mr. Speaker, I know that some will criticize us for this decision and say that we should give the break to small business instead or pass on any tax reductions to individual Albertans first, so let me put this in perspective. Alberta's tax rates for small business are already very competitive, and in comparison to the rates for bigger businesses small business today pays only 3 per cent. That was the target we set five years ago, and that target has been reached. We've seen no indication that our rates for small business are not competitive or fair. On the other hand, larger corporations face growing pressures to compete not only here in Canada but on a global basis. Alberta must be able to compete and attract business investment from around the world.

Mr. Speaker, in terms of tax reductions for individuals and families I also have some good news to report. Our priority again this year is low- and middle-income Albertans, lightening the load they pay and leaving more of their hard-earned tax dollars in their pockets, not ours.

As many will remember, Mr. Speaker, our first priority when Alberta's financial picture improved in the late 1990s was to reduce personal income taxes. As a result, from 1999 to 2001 our government phased in over \$1.5 billion in personal income tax cuts, including the single tax rate and the highest income exemptions in Canada.

This year the basic spousal and eligible dependant tax credits will be increased to \$14,899, compared to an average in other provinces of \$7,800 for the basic credit – that's for the basic credit in other provinces – and \$6,850 for spousal amounts. All tax credits in this province will be indexed, including the Alberta family employment tax credit. Together these changes will save Albertans about \$77 million in personal income taxes.

Mr. Speaker, effective April 1 we'll also increase the threshold for health care premiums by \$5,000. That means that a family with children will pay no health care premiums if their taxable income is less than \$32,210. This is a direct benefit to 140,000 people, and it will save them \$30 million in 2006-07 alone.

On top of these very important steps, Mr. Speaker, our government will also reduce school property tax rates by over 7 per cent and continue to protect Alberta seniors from paying increases in school property taxes.

We'll invest in research and innovation and continue to attract leading researchers to our province. We'll expand our research endowment funds, encourage innovation and faster commercialization of new energy technologies, invest over \$50 million in life

sciences research, and continue to support start-up business ventures.

4:00

We'll also continue to assist Alberta's agricultural producers in their ongoing recovery from the effects of drought, low commodity prices, and BSE. For the 2006 crop year we are extending the previously announced enhancements to the spring price endorsement and revenue insurance coverage programs. We are reducing the producers' share of production insurance premiums. These changes will provide some relief from rising input costs and sagging commodity prices while encouraging producers to protect themselves in an uncertain sector of our economy. In addition, we'll continue our efforts to promote value-added agriculture and secure a brighter future for Alberta's agriculture industry.

Taken together, these investments will make Alberta a fierce competitor for national and international business. It will maintain our commitment to small business, provide more certainty for agriculture producers, leave more money in Albertans' pockets, and support research, innovation, and leading-edge ideas.

Mr. Speaker, these are the highlights of Budget 2006. As I said at the outset, if there was ever a time for optimism about Alberta's future, this is it. With Budget 2006 we're determined to capture Alberta's optimism and hopes for the future, to address the challenges of today but, most important, to secure an even better future for our province and for generations of Albertans to come. We're also determined to play a strong leadership role on the national stage, contributing our ideas and experience and showing everyone that a strong Alberta makes for an even stronger Canada.

Mr. Speaker, in the Premier's television address a few weeks ago I listened to the voices of so many Albertans. I heard them talk about their hopes and their dreams for the future, and I listened as they talked and our Premier talked about Alberta and the kind of things that are possible here if we just set our minds to it.

The comments from one young man struck me in particular. He talked of his experience as a youth and how he works with youth today, and he said: "I've always been told opportunity knocks once. Not in Alberta. It knocks several times on your door. You just have to capitalize on the opportunity when it's there."

Mr. Speaker, opportunity is definitely knocking on Alberta's door. We can hear it. It's all around us. With this budget, with the right investments, and with our eyes on Alberta's future we're ready, and we will capitalize on every opportunity that comes our way.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Mr. Premier. Thank you, Albertans. To quote our Premier, welcome to Alberta's second century. With Albertans' unique blend of optimism, ingenuity, and sheer hard work, I have no doubt it will be even better than the first.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of her Majesty's Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to adjourn the debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that the Assembly adjourn until 8 this evening.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 4:05 p.m.]

