

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, March 12, 2007**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 2007/03/12

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Welcome.

Let us pray. As we begin our deliberations in this sitting of the Legislature, we ask for the insight we need to do our work to the benefit of our province and its people and to the benefit of our country. Amen.

Now, hon. members, we'll proceed to the singing of our national anthem. We'll be led today by Mr. Paul Lorieau. Would all participate in the language of their choice.

Hon. Members:

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

The Speaker: Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly the high commissioner for the Republic of Kenya, Her Excellency Judith Mbula Bahemuka. With the high commissioner is Mr. Kennedy Barasa, second counsellor of the high commission in Ottawa. This is the high commissioner's first visit to Alberta, and we feel honoured that she chose to come to our province less than a year into her appointment.

We had lunch today with Her Excellency, and we had some great discussions about potential partnerships in not only postsecondary but in the other areas of forestry and agriculture. As well, the high commissioner spoke very passionately about her belief in education and postsecondary.

They are seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker. I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

head:

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly two people sitting in your gallery today who are members of the Edmonton branch of the Royal Commonwealth Society. The society is a cosponsor and assists with the promotion of the annual Alberta Commonwealth Parliamentary Association student essay competition. I'd ask that Dr. John Slade, treasurer, and Mr. Joe Zasada, director at large, rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Ms Haley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a rare privilege for me to be able to introduce to you a brand new Albertan, my brand new granddaughter. She'll be three days old at 1:58 today. Her name is Alexa Grace Kathleen Haley. She is accompanied by her dad and mom, Jeff and Layna Haley. I would ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this province.

The Speaker: Well, I must say that I am stunned. The hon. member is way too young to be a grandmother.

The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour and privilege again to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House a group of grade 6 students from the Rimbey elementary school. They are accompanied by their teacher, Mrs. Howey, and parent helpers Lennie McFadyen, Mary Palm, Laura Baker, Mike Weatherald, Joanne McNaught, and Ann-Marie Trautman. They are seated in the public gallery. I'd ask them to rise now and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today. The first is Annemarie Larsen. Annemarie is participating in a job shadowing program, so she job shadowed me this morning. Annemarie is a law student at the University of Alberta and already has a BA in psychology and philosophy under her belt, so no wonder she is going into law. She is very interested in increasing the role of women in the Legislature and is especially interested in representation of women and women's issues. I'd ask Annemarie to please rise and accept the warm welcome of the House.

My second introduction today, Mr. Speaker, is the new outreach co-ordinator for the Edmonton-Centre constituency office. It's taken us a long time to find him, so we are very pleased to welcome Richard Engelhardt. Richard's past positions have been as office manager for the PRIDE centre, and he also worked for some time for Martin Equipment. He is currently working toward a bachelor of fine arts, with a major in sociology and a minor in psychology, at Grant MacEwan College. I would ask Richard to please rise and accept our warm welcome.

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

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, as well, have two introductions. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a constituent who has been in the news over the development of her three boys. They have each been diagnosed with the rare disease known as Hunter syndrome, and unless the boys are treated with Elaprase, the boys face an early, certain death. I've asked Nicole to come forward today to remind the minister that she is still waiting for a meeting. I'd like Nicole Miranda as well as her mother, Sandra Hartling, to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The second introduction, Mr. Speaker, to you and through you to all members of the Assembly is the grade 6 class from Lago Lindo elementary school in my constituency. There are 52 of them. They are accompanied by their teachers, Mr. Peters and Mrs. Goodall, as well as parent helpers Mrs. Heemeryck, Mrs. Lesyk, Mr. Rowley, Mrs. Mah, Mr. Odenbach, and Mrs. LaBrie. I would like them all to please rise and receive the welcome of the Assembly.

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to introduce to you and through you to the rest of the Assembly two dedicated workers in the province of Alberta, part of the Farmworkers Union of Alberta. They are here for the third year in a row, calling for dignity and basic human rights for farm workers. If you'd stand, we will give you the welcome of the Legislature.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is with great pleasure that I introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Deron Bilous. Deron was born and raised here in Edmonton and received his bachelor of education from the University of Alberta in 2001. He currently teaches English and physical education at Inner City high. Deron has worked with Canada World Youth, supervising international youth exchange programs across Canada and in China, Brazil, and Poland. We are proud to have Deron join the NDP team as our candidate in Edmonton-Centre in the next election. He is seated in the public gallery, and I would now ask that he rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:40

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I, too, am very delighted to introduce to you and through you to this House Christina Gray. Christina teaches computer programming at DevStudios. She was born in Edmonton and has lived in the Woodvale community in Mill Woods for the last four years. She is the chair of the Edmonton Transit System Advisory Board and volunteers on the Support Network's 24-hour crisis line. Christina is also active in our community working on both the Woodvale Community League and the Mill Woods Crime Prevention Council. We are pleased to have Christina as part of the NDP team as a candidate in Edmonton-Mill Woods for the next election. I will now ask Christina to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the rest of the Assembly some staff from my department and the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks & Wildlife Foundation, who just spent the past two weeks braving frigid temperatures up north in Whitehorse. These individuals were there as part of Team Alberta, which was competing at the 2007 Canada Winter Games. The games bring together the best young athletes in 21 different sport disciplines once every four years, and once again Alberta proved to the rest of the country that we are a force to reckon with. We brought home 79 medals, good for a third-place finish behind Quebec and Ontario. This is the fourth time Alberta has finished a Canada Winter Games in third place, which was the goal set by the team before the games began.

Here today from Team Alberta mission staff are Cam Berwald, the team's chef de mission. Cam did an incredible job keeping 260 athletes in check and ready to compete. She was helped by Scott Fraser, the assistant chef de mission, and others who provided valuable support to Team Alberta, including Korrine Krokosh, Jerry George, Roger Kramers, Steve Pritchard, and Lloyd Bentz. They are seated in the members' gallery. I would like them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

head:

Oral Question Period

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

Holy Cross Care Centre

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Forty-two seniors in Calgary are currently being relocated from the Holy Cross centre long-term care facility due to inadequate care and fire code violations. This incident indicates that the facilities that care for our most vulnerable citizens do not appear to have improved since the Auditor General's scathing report into long-term care nearly two years ago. The province also refuses to implement legislated, province-wide standards for continuing care. My questions are to the Premier. Given that long-term care residents in the Holy Cross centre will be moved out over the next 30 days, how can the Premier reassure Albertans that the health and safety of the assisted living residents who will remain in the building are not also at risk?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we have very good policies and procedures in place to protect those in care. With respect to assisted living it's an administrative matter, and I'll leave it to the minister of health to answer.

The Speaker: Hon. minister, do you wish to supplement?

If not, the hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: has the Premier been able to determine how long the residents were at risk before the decision was made to move them?

Mr. Stelmach: There was a fair amount of work done by the minister of health, and he'll be able to answer that question.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's been some ongoing monitoring of the situation at the long-term care centre at the Holy Cross in Calgary. There was an inspection, I'm advised, by the city of Calgary on the fire and safety codes issues, and a report was issued on that in December. I was made aware of the situation early in February, I believe. The Calgary regional health authority has been monitoring the situation relative to the long-term care beds in that particular facility and working with the fire and safety codes people to make sure that safety is not compromised for the residents. There has been a fire watch put in place, as I understand it, and the Calgary regional health authority has put in place their own personnel to make sure that both the safety issues and the care issues of the long-term care residents in that facility are taken care of.

With respect to the assisted living, that is a private facility, but they still operate under the fire codes and safety codes, so the owners of the facility will have to answer to the city of Calgary's fire and safety with respect to making sure that safety is monitored on that side as well.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: given that the Auditor General's report on the quality of long-term care across the province indicated that clear standards of care were needed – and that was two years ago – why is this government continuing to delay on creating legislated province-wide standards of care?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the province of Alberta has invested a considerable amount of money in the care of our seniors and will continue to do that. I know that there were additional dollars that went into the ministry's budget to move us forward towards the recommendations that came forward from the long-term care committee. We're doing the best we can. Just by memory, I think there was at least \$70 million injected into it. But if further details are required, I can have the minister respond.

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

Royalty Review Panel

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government is failing its claims to openness and accountability when it comes to the issue of appointments to the Royalty Review Panel. Instead of a truly independent, balanced panel, we have a flawed process, blatant conflicts of interest, and serious questions about panelists' qualifications and their independence from this government. Albertans have questions they want this Premier to answer. To the Premier: given the Minister of Finance's embarrassing admission last week that unbeknownst to him one panel member – and I quote *Hansard* – “has actually done a considerable amount of work on finances with regard to oil companies,” will the Premier tell this Assembly what personal financial interests this individual may have in energy-related businesses?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, what Albertans want to know at the completion of this royalty review is whether the royalty regime that's in place today is fair: fair to those that make hundreds of billions of dollars' worth of investment in the oil and gas industry and also to all of us as Albertans, as equal shareholders in the natural resources. That is the purpose of this royalty review.

Dr. Taft: Again, he's failing to be open and accountable, so I will ask him another question. To the Premier: given that the Minister of Finance admits that he was unaware of the panelist's history of working with oil companies prior to his appointment, can the Premier tell this Assembly what qualified this person as panelist in the first place other than that he is a friend of the Premier?

Mr. Stelmach: Well, making allegations in the House like that – he doesn't know who my friends are, who my enemies are, so maybe do a little bit more research on that.

Actually, Mr. Speaker, all members of the panel are professionals. They're economists. They're people with professional designations. I expect them to live up to their commitments as professionals in those key areas, to do a very thorough review of the royalties, put all that information on the table, and Albertans will make that determination of whether the royalty regime is fair or not.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier, and I will continue until he answers: is the Premier finally prepared to answer the question of whether any panelists or their companies financially supported his or the Minister of Finance's PC leadership campaigns?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, following the question from the hon. leader last week, I made a commitment that I'd check to make sure if there was anything coming from any member of the five members on the committee. There are none at all in terms of any contribu-

tions to me, you know, to my campaign. They checked whatever company names or individual names, and there are none on the record.

Dr. Oberg: Mr. Speaker, I would just add to that that none of the people on the royalty review commission made any contribution to my leadership campaign.

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

1:50

Holy Cross Care Centre

(continued)

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are to the Premier. Given the old Holy Cross hospital site's ongoing list of problems and controversies since it was sold to private owners 10 years ago – toxic mould, asbestos abatement issues, fire code violations, and now the Calgary health region's conclusion that the long-term care facility fails to meet provincial standards of care – it's time to make sure that private providers of care are held accountable, and it's time to restore public confidence. Will the Premier commit to launching a public inquiry into the operations of the Holy Cross site?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, no. I have great confidence in the Calgary regional health authority, that has a contract with the owners. First and foremost, it's safety and, of course, care of our seniors in that institution. If there is any further work to be done by the Calgary regional health authority or further help that they require from this government, we'll be there to help.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the potential province-wide implications here, the ongoing problems at the Holy Cross site, the inherent vulnerability of the residents in care, and the province's duty of care to the residents, why won't the Premier do the right thing and investigate the situation?

Mr. Stelmach: The authority is responsible to the minister of health, and if the minister of health feels that either the Calgary regional health authority or someone in the process isn't doing their job, I'm sure that the minister will step in and ensure the safety of our seniors in that facility.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the health minister's admission just a moment ago that he knew of fire code violations in the Holy Cross building in early February and given that the residents of the assisted living facility there have recently been notified that their rents are increasing by about 40 per cent, what is the Premier doing to rectify one or the other matter?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the kinds of long-term care services that Alberta provides are outstanding. In fact, we spend a considerable amount of money in terms of the care, the amount of insured drugs, the kind of health services. Is there more to do, generally speaking, across the province for an aging population? Certainly. Those are going to be the kind of cost pressures that are going to be coming forward in the budget that will be presented in this House. We're trying to find people to fill all of the positions – dietary and

housekeeping, not only nursing and physicians – to take care of our seniors. But I'm proud of the progress that has been accomplished and proud of the fact that we're going to move ahead in this area.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party, followed by the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Alberta Clipper Pipeline Proposal

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. During his PC leadership campaign the Premier said that exporting raw bitumen to the U.S. for processing is like scraping off the topsoil, selling it, and thinking we have a rich farm because we have cash in the bank. If we insist on selling raw product out of this province, our province will lose not only the taxes and royalties on the value-added products but also high-quality and long-term jobs. If approved, the Alberta Clipper pipeline would do just that: send jobs and taxes elsewhere for someone else's profit. My question is to the Premier. Given your promises to Albertans during the PC leadership race, will you now reject the Alberta Clipper pipeline proposal?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, well, at least someone was listening to what I was saying during the leadership campaign. Thank you very much for quoting it almost verbatim.

Part of our ongoing discussion with Albertans is how we can increase our tax base by adding more value not only to oil and gas and the petrochemical industry but also to agriculture and forestry. The discussions that are occurring with respect to how we can add value to bitumen are important to us. We are of course going through the review at the moment, and then the next step is: how can we work with industry and Albertans to ensure that the future generations have more in terms of a secure fiscal regime other than just selling off natural resources?

Mr. Mason: Words don't make jobs, Mr. Speaker.

The question to the Premier is this. Will the government reject the Alberta Clipper project, which is now under consideration and which will do exactly what the Premier said that he wouldn't do?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. leader of the third party is well aware of the position that I and this government and my caucus have taken. We're going to look at every opportunity to add value to raw products, oil and gas or agriculture or forestry.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, one more time to the Premier: will he ensure that he closes the barn door before the horse is gone and stand in this House and tell us the government's position on the approval of the Alberta Clipper project to export unprocessed bitumen to the United States?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, there have been agreements put in place prior to my arrival in this particular position. All I'm saying very clearly to all industry is that part of a very important goal of this government is to add value to products, and we're going to move in that direction. We're going to discuss with various industries to put those policies in place. What has been done in the past I can't undo.

The other issue here too . . . [interjections] Just hold it. Hold it. Hold it. Don't get too excited. The other part here is that there also has to be a need to place value on bitumen. Okay? And here's the other question: some of it will have to be exported to get the value of bitumen in the world market to see how we can find the balance

in terms of what that bitumen is actually worth. So it's a little more complex than what the hon. member makes it out to be.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Agricultural Assistance

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the federal government announced \$1 billion in funding to the Canadian agricultural income stabilization program, also known as CAIS. I know that Alberta farmers have been watching this program closely, especially with the challenges facing the agricultural sector in recent years. Six hundred million dollars would go to start a producer savings account somewhat like the previous NISA program, and \$400 million would go towards production costs. Farmers have been battling drought, BSE, low commodity prices, and now high input costs. My question is for the Minister of Agriculture and Food. How does this assistance purport to tackle these issues?

Mr. Groeneveld: Mr. Speaker, this is indeed good news. While the federal money depends on budget approval, it does point in the right direction for Alberta. However, at this particular time not all of the details are in. Most of this money would go to kick-starting the savings accounts that Alberta has in fact pressed for for the last number of years. This will let the producer direct his or her own funds, with a matching grant from the government. We are also pleased that there is recognition of the cost of production in it because we all know that the costs of production are certainly on the rise all the time.

But as I said, Mr. Speaker, I still have to see the details and how they help Alberta's industry. CAIS is far from perfect, in my mind, and I hope that this is an indication that we will see some good common sense and changes coming. They are indeed long overdue.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: how does this announcement get to the recent challenges with eroding reference margins, and where does this put Alberta after all of the extra work that we've done with the existing CAIS program?

Mr. Groeneveld: That raises a good point, Mr. Speaker. Back-to-back disasters have put our operators in a tight position. However, no one could have seen this coming. Alberta responded a few years ago with a pilot project to provide more realistic support that reflected the real-life situation on our farms today. This is a key issue that we're hammering at with the federal government and continue to work on, but Alberta is indeed committed to some interim support, as we always have been, over and above the regular call.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister be getting some of these issues resolved at the national table?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Alberta still has a lot of work to do on the whole CAIS issue, but we've had some excellent opportunities to make changes this year. While the national policy framework that my predecessor has been working on is pretty much

complete now, we met in Leduc this last week with 60 stakeholders to move this forward and try to improve the opportunities for our Alberta farmers. I am looking forward in the next months here – I think it's on April 12 and one time in June – to meeting with the federal minister and provincial ministers to discuss this further.

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Integrated Land-use Management Strategy

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government continues to fail the people of Alberta in protecting our environment and special places. The Rumsey natural area, 149 square kilometres, has been subject to increasing oil and gas development for years pending its designation as a heritage rangeland. Recent surveys of the area have revealed many examples of failed protection, weed infestation, and failed reclamation from previous resource companies. Agreement with various stakeholder groups was reached for no new roads and no new well pads many years ago. Still, new CBM wells have been recently approved. To the Premier: since public polls are also saying that they don't want to support new development on these lands, and a 2001 agreement was to phase out new development in these areas, why is this area not off limits to oil and gas development?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, my information is that there were previous agreements that had to be honoured before land was of course assigned to the special places. But I don't know all of the details, and I'll leave it to the minister responsible.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite is asking a very, very important question. I need to say that the Rumsey block itself that he's talking about includes two protected areas. In the one, certainly, there is absolutely no oil or gas activity that is allowed in the Rumsey ecological reserve. But in the Rumsey natural areas energy commitments are subject to the conditions that were established in 1993, Mr. Speaker, as part of the multistakeholder plan, and that particular plan states that surface access is subject to various specific restrictions. My staff worked and is continuing to work with Alberta Sustainable Resource Development to determine what conditions to attach to minimize the impact of the existing activity.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development: given that Albertans have waited 14 years for an integrated land-use framework that protects sensitive areas such as the Rumsey, when will we see a completed land-use strategy?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our new Premier's commitment, of course, is to secure the quality of life and also manage growth pressures for all Albertans, and in that vein, he has given our ministry, Sustainable Resource Development, our number one mandate: coming up with, developing a land-use framework. The integrated land management process, something that is already in place, will be developed, will be folded into that. I can assure you

that Albertans are going to be very happy with this process. Public consultations are going forth starting this spring and more stakeholder consultation starting in May or June. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Environment: given that evidence exists that coal-bed methane activity is already affecting groundwater, what are you doing with the results, and where are the results of the past five years of coal-bed methane experimentation in the Horseshoe Canyon formation?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, the issue related to the analysis of the water and coal-bed methane is an ongoing, continuous event. As the member well knows, we've had discussions. There are test wells that have been and are currently being drilled. The results from those wells are something that is taken over time, so the analysis will take some time. I'm sure that once we've got some kind of sufficient amount of data to make some kind of meaningful determination, we'll be pleased to share those results with the member.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Federal Equalization Payments

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There seems to be some confusion over Alberta's position on the equalization formula that would potentially include natural resource revenues. My question is to the Premier. Mr. Premier, can you please advise this Assembly what Alberta's position is on the proposed inclusion of natural resources in the equalization formula?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we have a letter. When I say we, the Council of the Federation, this is all of the 10 Premiers. This letter was of course written to the then chair, the former Premier Ralph Klein, and again reiterated the position that the federal government will not include natural resource revenue in the calculation of the equalization formula. All we're doing is that we're going to hold the Prime Minister to that commitment.

Mr. Lukaszuk: My first supplemental is to the Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations. Have you had an opportunity to advise your federal counterparts, in particular the Prime Minister's office, of Alberta's position as just stated by the Premier on the potential inclusion of natural resources in any potential equalization formulas?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, our Premier has submitted exactly the point regarding that we do not support nonrenewable resources being part of the equalization formula. I will table this letter that our Premier has submitted to the Prime Minister and also a copy of the letter from the Prime Minister to the government of Alberta and to our Premier, indicating that he has no intention of including nonrenewable resources in the formula. We expect him to live up to that commitment he made as a Prime Minister that comes from Alberta.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, my second supplemental is to the Minister of Finance. Have you had an opportunity to communicate Alberta's position as stated by this Premier on the inclusion of natural resources in any equalization formula to your federal counterpart prior to his dropping of the federal budget?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I would like to reiterate to people that the federal equalization program is based on federal taxation dollars. So it is federal taxation dollars that are coming from Alberta, going to Ottawa, and then are equalized.

The second point is that if the resource dollars are included in the equalization formula, according to the O'Brien report they're potentially looking at an increase of \$900 million. If we were to receive dollars back from that – and I must emphasize, Mr. Speaker, that that's a big if – we would be receiving about \$90 million. But the most important thing for Albertans is the per capita payments. Currently in Alberta there are eight provinces who receive over \$925 per capita. In Alberta we receive \$755. If we were to go to the level of \$925 per capita, which seven of 10 provinces are at, it would mean another \$571 million for the province of Alberta, which is a huge sum.

Mr. Speaker, in direct response to the hon. member's question: yes, I have communicated this position to the Minister of Finance, and we are talking prior to the budget being released.

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

Funding for Persons with Developmental Disabilities

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. People with disabilities and their caregivers are not being given the attention or the respect that they deserve. The turnover rate for caregivers of people with disabilities ranges from an astounding 40 to 90 per cent. The community is very vocal about the need for increased funding for front-line staff in order to provide safe and adequate services. My question would be to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. What plan does the minister have to ensure that people with developmental disabilities will not have to reduce the amount of care they receive because of inadequate funding?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This province has one of the best records across the country in supplying services to those with disabilities. It is going to continue to be an emphasis of this government. I'd say that over the last seven years our funding has increased over 80 per cent, a very substantial increase when the caseload is nowhere near those kinds of numbers. We do acknowledge that this is a group of people that are in need of assistance. These are some of the most vulnerable people in our society, and we take it very seriously to ensure that they have the levels of support that they require.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Another question to the same minister: what plan does the minister have to respond to the needs of the community by improving wages for front-line care workers to maintain the ones that we have?

2:10

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, I met recently with the association of service providers and will continue to meet with all those providing the services to those persons with developmental disabilities. We have also just recently reallocated from our budget funds another \$11.3 million directly to developmental disability boards. That'll go

to the service providers in acknowledgement of the wages and ensure that we can meet those needs to ensure that those people can retain the staff that they require.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. That is welcome news. I'm hoping that it will be enough. What concrete action will the minister take to prove to the people with disabilities that they really are a priority with this government and it'll show in the next budget?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess we'll stay tuned to the next budget so that we can answer more fully that question.

It has been a priority. The funding levels have been increasing each year, and it will continue to be that. We are going to ensure that it's not just a matter of dollars; we're going to work very closely on how we get best use for those dollars in our organization. How do we ensure that we get the best creative approaches to providing those services amongst those delivering that service? We're going to work closely with those providing the services. We're going to ensure that it's supported by the funding necessary and ensure that these people are very much important to all Albertans.

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

Gravel Pit Reclamation

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the municipalities in my constituency, Camrose county, contacted me regarding the code of practice for gravel pits. They're concerned about the follow-up on the reclamation of abandoned gravel pits. If these pits are not reclaimed, they become a haven for noxious weeds and illegal dumping, which then becomes an issue for the municipality. My question is to the Minister of Environment. What can be done to address the noxious weeds and illegal dumping in the abandoned gravel pits?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I think it's important to understand that as long as a gravel pit exists, it is the responsibility of the approval holder to ensure that there are no adverse effects on the environment. So to specifically answer the member's question, if the county, or any other Albertan for that matter, feels that there are environmental concerns associated with a gravel pit, I would encourage them to call Alberta Environment. We have a 24-hour complaint line: 1-800-222-6514.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you. To the same minister: does Alberta Environment have a process for following up on reclamation, including a timeline for reclamation?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, once an approval holder decides to reclaim a gravel pit, there are a couple of things that happen. First of all, they are required to reclaim it to standard. It's in their best interest to ensure that they do so because associated with the approval is a security deposit that is held, and that security deposit would be held until Alberta Environment is satisfied that the gravel pit or any other kind of environmental issue is dealt with adequately through a reclamation certificate.

Mr. Johnson: To the same minister: so, Mr. Minister, if these pits are abandoned and not reclaimed, then what is the process by which a municipality can have the pit reclaimed?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I mentioned in answer to the previous question the matter of a security deposit. That security deposit is established at a sufficient value that if the gravel pit has not been reclaimed, the security deposit is held, and the proceeds will be used by Alberta Environment to ensure that the reclamation is conducted appropriately.

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

Trade, Investment, and Labour Mobility

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In just 20 days the trade, investment, and labour mobility agreement, or TILMA, between this province and British Columbia comes into effect. There has been to date no discussion in this Chamber on the substance or timing of the agreement. It was negotiated behind closed doors, away from the inconvenient prying eyes of Albertans. My first question is to the Premier. How can the Premier justify such an undemocratic, nontransparent process?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the agreement that the hon. member is talking about is actually a groundbreaking agreement that other provinces, including the province of Ontario – and Saskatchewan has already inquired to see if they can be a partner. I had a very good meeting with Premier Fentie from the Yukon, who wants to see if he can participate as well. We do have a scheduled period of implementation. There'll be more discussion with respect to this particular agreement.

An Hon. Member: Behind closed doors.

Mr. Stelmach: Behind closed doors. They always come up with "behind closed doors." Mr. Speaker, do you see the door open here or open there? No, but it's the most public facility right here in the province of Alberta, so I don't know where they're coming up with this "behind closed doors."

Mr. Bonko: To the Premier again: what additional funding are municipalities, school boards, health regions, academic institutions going to receive to enable them to be fully compliant with TILMA's many provisions?

Mr. Stelmach: This agreement, Mr. Speaker, is to break down the barriers of trade, labour mobility, procurement between the province of British Columbia and Alberta. Now, before the two cabinets met over a period of a number of years, we had rules that would actually not permit a licensed welder – a red seal welder can weld pipeline on the Alberta side right up to this imaginary line, the Alberta/B.C. border, but could not weld the same pipeline on the other side. Well, if we're going to compete around the world in terms of our exports, we're going to have to co-operate locally. That is very, very important because without that co-operation we'll not be able to maintain our global competitiveness.

Mr. Bonko: Well, Mr. Speaker, maybe I'll try it again. Same question: what additional funding are the municipalities, school boards, health authorities, academic institutions going to receive to enable them to be fully compliant with TILMA's many provisions?

Mr. Stelmach: One of the first questions I hear is: how much additional funding? This is to save money to ensure that we become more efficient and more effective, and where this issue of more money coming forward – I'm not quite sure. There's about \$14 billion of economic barriers today in the country of Canada as a result of these regulations that were put in there years and years ago for no reason at all, but today they're costing all of us a considerable amount of money, and that is one of the reasons why we entered into this agreement. As I said, we have an implementation period. We'll meet with municipalities and all of the MUSH sector to make sure that everybody has the information necessary to move ahead.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Alberta/Montana Electricity Transmission Line

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans have serious concerns about the construction of a 500 kV power line through central Alberta. The EUB has failed to appropriately consult the people affected by this line in a timely manner. While Albertans demand decisive action on climate change, the government seeks to approve massive new coal plants and inefficient long-distance overhead power lines for this new project. My questions are to the Premier. Considering that this 500 kV power line is designed in part as a merchant line to export electricity, why are Alberta ratepayers expected to pay the full price for this new power line?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the hearings, I believe, have begun today in Red Deer in terms of the transmission line, so I'm not going to make any comments about that because it's before the board.

With respect to the other issue in terms of greenhouse gas emissions, I believe that last week our Minister of Environment tabled legislation, the only piece of legislation to be tabled in all of Canada with respect to setting some targets for greenhouse gas emissions and putting in place a process to reduce greenhouse gas emissions over a period of time, so we're taking a leadership role in this area.

2:20

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, the intensity and absolute reductions are two completely different things. The Premier is referring to the former. So I would very much like to ask the Premier how he could justify a scheme to burn coal in Alberta to produce electricity to export out of the province while Albertans are left holding the bag with all the carbon dioxide and other toxic emissions.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the first question from the party was about adding value to bitumen. Well, if you do put in an upgrader plant, which I believe they support, guess what? There'll be more CO₂ emitted. Now, all of a sudden, they're saying they're moving toward absolute. I say: you want absolute, like right now? Park your car. That'll give you absolute emissions right now.

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would be delighted to, absolutely. I would consider parking my car the day that all the SUVs from the other side get parked. I would be happy to do so: same day, same service, no problem.

Mr. Speaker, considering how confused the approval process has been so far, why won't the Premier at least delay the hearings until a full and public disclosure can be made and the affected farmers in the region can be done with their calving season?

Mr. Stelmach: There are two parts to that question. With respect to

parking, that's the same old thing: always somebody expecting somebody else to take the first step. Not me, you know. If I want a 20-minute shower, it's up to me. Everybody else has to have a five-minute shower.

Anyway, with respect to the farmers those issues we've heard very clearly. Our MLAs are getting the kind of letters and questions with respect to compensation. All of those issues, I'm very confident, will be dealt with by the authority that's in place, and that's the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board.

The Speaker: Okay. I heard it. I'll get the light bulbs changed as soon as I can. The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Oil and Gas Activity in Rumsey Natural Area

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently a Texas-based company was granted approval to drill for coal-bed methane in Rumsey natural area. My question is to the Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture. Why is drilling allowed in an area that is designated as protected?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated earlier, the Rumsey block includes two protected areas, and one of them allows certain activities to happen whereas the other one doesn't.

It's important to recognize that Alberta's special places program ran from 1995 until 2001 and put over 2 million hectares of land under protection in 81 new and 13 expanded areas. As I indicated, there were four areas established under special places. We agreed to honour the existing oil and gas commitments as a matter of fairness. Ten areas, including Rumsey natural area, were under consideration for protection before special places. Their designation, therefore, allowed and followed a different process, resulting in different levels of industrial activities there.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My only supplemental is to the same minister. Is there an opportunity to limit the amount of oil and gas activity in the Rumsey natural area?

Mr. Goudreau: Well, Mr. Speaker, over 27,000 square kilometres of Alberta's great outdoors are presently preserved. I need to say that we've got over 500 parks and protected areas, covering an area about the size of Belgium, Mr. Speaker. I need to add that our continued prosperity is very much dependent on striking a balance between our economic growth and our environmental protection.

Mr. Speaker, this government is committed to both managing growth pressure and improving Alberta's quality of life, and to further that, my staff will keep on discussing those particular concerns with the Minister of Energy and his staff.

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

Family Violence

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Council of Women's Shelters has just released its statistics for the past fiscal year, and the numbers are sobering. Alberta has the highest rate of domestic violence of any province, and the council's report suggests that many women and children are not getting the services they need.

To the Minister of Children's Services: given that in the past year

13,000 women and children were turned away from women's shelters because they were full, what backup plan does the minister have to ensure that these endangered women and children receive the help that they need?

Ms Tarchuk: Well, thank you very much. First of all, I appreciate the question. I think this is a very important area. Also, I want to say that the people that work in women's shelters have my upmost respect because I think they do incredible work rebuilding the lives of families.

One thing I would say: several weeks ago I did meet with some representation from the Council of Women's Shelters, and that was one of the reasons why I wanted to make sure that we made the announcement last week that we did, the 3 per cent retroactive to last year, April 1, 2006, because I do know that one of their top issues was staffing.

The other thing I can say is that we're very close to finalizing the women's shelter review, and that will be very telling for us. It's been a very thorough review. It took a look at where we came from when we look at the history of women's shelters, what's working really well, and how we can move forward. So I do look forward to working with stakeholders once that review is released.

Mrs. Mather: To the Solicitor General: given the essential role of police services in protecting women and children from domestic violence, what resources are dedicated to this issue to ensure that police are able to respond to cases effectively?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I want to reiterate that this government is committed to providing safe and secure communities for all Albertans. Specifically, in regard to domestic violence we are committed to reducing family violence, a very high priority for our government. For example, we have allocated \$1.7 million toward the Alberta relationship threat assessment and management initiative, or TAMI. It's a first in Canada. It links police, prosecutors, and community agencies to help reduce and prevent domestic violence and stalking.

Mrs. Mather: To the minister of municipal affairs: given that a reported 75 per cent of women who returned to abusive partners after receiving services cited lack of affordable housing as the main reason, a 50 per cent increase from 2005, how will the minister ensure that housing options are available for women experiencing domestic violence?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to say that affordable housing is a priority of this government. The establishment of the housing task force, that has been throughout Alberta, consulting with Albertans to hear some of the challenges that Albertans have, is going to report to my ministry on March 19. At that time we will go through the process, and we'll definitely have a report for this government.

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

Outbreak of Infectious Syphilis

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the weekend

Albertans were warned about the risk of sexually transmitted infections due to a significant rise in the number of syphilis cases. Nine babies have been born with this infection in the past two years, and the infection has spread beyond the traditional high-risk groups. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. At this time can you update this Assembly on the infectious syphilis outbreak and why it exists?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, on Friday we did put out a news release in the province, indicating that we were very concerned about the outbreak of syphilis in the province, a serious increase. When you talk about 200 cases, it may not seem like a lot, but the exponential increase year over year is very significant and important enough that we want to make sure that Albertans are aware of it and taking appropriate precautions. The outbreak is widespread. It's not isolated to any particular area or any particular identifiable group. An Albertan as young as 15 and an Albertan as old as 81 have been affected.

As the hon. member has indicated, we've had nine cases of congenital syphilis diagnosed, babies born with the infection. That hasn't happened in Alberta for a significant period of time, so we're very concerned about it. We want to make sure that Albertans are aware of it and that they're taking the appropriate precautions.

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. To the same minister: what is the province doing to reduce the number of cases?

Mr. Hancock: Well, as I mentioned, Mr. Speaker, we did put out a notice on Friday to Albertans, which was picked up by the news media. In addition, we will be engaging in a public educational awareness campaign. We're putting out notice to doctors across the province to be aware of the problem and the risk and to talk, where appropriate, to their patients with respect to it and encourage those who are engaged in unprotected sex, particularly in risky unprotected sex, to be cognizant of the issue and to be tested where appropriate.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. My last question is to the Minister of Education. Given that youth believe that these infections can be cured with antibiotics and there won't be any significant lasting effects, can the minister tell us how schools are impressing the dangers of sexually transmitted diseases onto their students?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, there would be two areas that I would talk about. One would be the health and life skills that take place in grades 4 to 9, but probably more important is what's known as CALM in high schools, which is career and life management. These programs teach our children about the importance of healthy, caring, and, I guess above all, safe relationships. But I do need to state that these kinds of discussions also need to happen outside the classroom as parents have a responsibility to make sure that they have open and honest discussions with their children about those safe and healthy relationships.

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

Federal Equalization Payments

(continued)

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As referenced by the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs earlier today, this government is sending mixed messages to their federal Tory cousins on equalization payments. A month ago both the Premier and the Finance minister opposed the inclusion of resource revenues in the formula that is used to calculate federal transfers, yet according to quotes attributed to the Finance minister in today's media, the minister appears to have flip-flopped on the issue. My question is for the Minister of Finance. Given that the Finance minister's response earlier today in question period only served to muddy the waters, will he please clarify once and for all: is it his position to go along with 50 per cent of resource revenues to be included in the calculations or not?

Dr. Oberg: Mr. Speaker, I think the Premier and the minister of international and intergovernmental relations made it perfectly clear, as did I, as to what our stand was on it. It's very important to tell the Legislative Assembly that these are the federal tax dollars. These are tax dollars that the federal government receives, albeit, I will say, too much, too high. But it is their tax dollars that they are distributing back according to a formula, the equalization formula, that was first enacted in the 1950s, so it is their right to do it. From our point of view, if the pie is there, we don't receive anything from the pie at all. We don't receive any dollars back.

So the issue that I'm concerned about, Mr. Speaker, is one thing, and that's the per capita pool and the CST and the CHT. The reason is that the federal government is double-equalizing. They're equalizing on the equalization formula, and then they're equalizing on the per capita pool. That's not right, and that's not fair to Albertans. Five hundred and seventy-one million dollars are at stake here simply because we are Alberta. I think it's extremely important to ensure that our per capita payments are the same regardless of where you live in Canada. Let the equalization pool be over here, per capita. That's very important to us.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thought it was a yes or no question.

To the Minister of Finance. Given that the minister is quoted today as saying, "We also recognize that there's certainly a high chance" that 50 per cent of resource revenues will be included in the formula, "is going to come in whether we say anything or not," my question is for the minister. Has this minister given up when it comes to protecting Alberta's interests against Ottawa?

Dr. Oberg: Mr. Speaker, I do anything but give up when it comes to Alberta's interests. Alberta's interests are served on two fronts, on the equalization as well as on the per capita. Whether or not the O'Brien report comes in, whether or not 50 per cent of natural resources comes in is up to the federal government. Ultimately it's their dollars. But – and I will illustrate again – what is extremely important to us are the per capita dollars, which could mean a difference of \$571 million to the citizens of Alberta, and quite frankly because we live in Alberta should not be the reason why we only receive a portion of the per capita payments.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My third

question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Given that your department's annual report shows that it received \$5.2 million in federal transfers last year, is your department concerned about the mixed messages that are being sent to your federal Tory cousins in Ottawa?

Dr. Morton: As Minister of Sustainable Resource Development I've received a briefing on our finances, but I am not aware of that specific line item. So, Mr. Speaker, with your permission I'll get the answer to that question and get it back to the hon. member.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance to supplement?

Dr. Oberg: To supplement, Mr. Speaker. I will reiterate that the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development does not receive one cent from the equalization formula. It is from the per capita spending that he receives.

head:

Members' Statements

The Speaker: Hon. members, before I get to recognize an hon. member, let me first of all acknowledge and draw to the attention of members certain activities.

All hon. members have on their desks today a copy of the Queen's Commonwealth Day 2007 message from Buckingham Palace of today's date. I just want to quote one paragraph from the Queen's message.

In today's difficult and sometimes divided world, I believe that it is more important than ever to keep trying to respect and understand each other better. Each and every one of us has hopes, needs, and priorities. Each of us is an individual, with ties of emotion and bonds of obligation – to culture, religion, community, country and beyond. In short, each of us is special.

Now, by way of recognizing special people in this Assembly, happy birthday today to the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security.

Six years ago on this date, March 12, 2001, 14 members were elected to this Assembly for the first time. So let's congratulate the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation, the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, the hon. Minister of Service Alberta, the hon. Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture, the hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology, the hon. Minister of Energy, the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmarr, the hon. members for Calgary-Shaw, for Calgary-Buffalo, for Calgary-Bow, for Grande Prairie-Wapiti, for Edmonton-Castle Downs, for Whitecourt-St. Anne, and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview. Six years today.

Fifteen years ago yesterday, on March 11 – sorry. Ten years ago yesterday, March 11, 1997. We do have a 15-year member, and we'll deal with him on Wednesday. But to the following members, congratulations on your 10th anniversary. I'm having the pages deliver to each and every one of you a 10-year Mace pin. To the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness, the hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General, the hon. Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry, the hon. Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations, the hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports, the hon. Minister of Children's Services, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose, the hon. Member for Strathcona, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, and the hon. Member for West Yellowhead: good work. Ten years in this place.

Now, one last point before I sit down. This is the third day of this session, and on Thursday I indicated that there were 84 questions and answers. Today there were 88 questions and answers. So if we sit here for 54 days and we have an average of 86 questions, you will have exhausted 4,644 questions and answers at this current pace.

In a few seconds from now I'll call on the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

2:40

Leonard Bolger

Mr. Ducharme: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to recognize a very special individual. On February 27, 2007, a great Albertan and Canadian, Mr. Leonard Bolger, passed away. Leonard Bolger was a man who was driven to advance Alberta's position as a leader in technology and innovation.

Before beginning his career, Mr. Bolger graduated from the Royal Military College in Kingston, Ontario, and later achieved his bachelor of science from the University of Toronto in 1954. He then joined the air force, where he flew CF-100s and was a test pilot on the Arrow program. After leaving the armed forces, Mr. Bolger worked with Shell Canada as a senior executive. He later retired as the vice-president of research and technology. Mr. Bolger served on the board of the Alberta Research Council and co-chaired the board of the Alberta Energy Research Institute since 2000.

Mr. Speaker, I had the privilege of serving as the MLA co-chair for four years with Mr. Bolger, and I can attest that his hard work was focused on improving Albertans' and Canadians' quality of life. He was a leader in expanding the science and technology capability of Canada, specifically in Alberta. He was instrumental in the launch of EnergyINet, a technology network sponsored by a number of governments and companies across Canada. He also served as director emeritus of the Canadian Institute for Advanced Research and on the board of the Back Door, a Calgary-based organization which helps youth get off the streets. He was also a recipient of the Alberta centennial medal.

Mr. Bolger will be sorely missed by his friends and associates, who benefited enormously from his advice and counsel over many years. Thank you, Len, for your dedication to Alberta and to Canada. On behalf of all my colleagues at the Alberta Legislature I send my warmest regards and condolences to his family: Jean, Karen, David, Lesley, and Neil.

Rest eternal grant unto him, O Lord, and let light perpetual shine upon him.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Live Organ Harvesting

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to raise a very disturbing issue in this House in an effort to see if we can bring some light to this situation. On January 25 a public forum was held at the U of A on illicit organ snatching and transplant tourism in China. David Matas, an international human rights lawyer, and David Kilgour, former secretary of state for Canada, spoke at that forum. They are the authors of a shocking report on live organ harvesting in China. On February 2 these two gentlemen called on all states to ban transplant tourism in China. The call was made in a report which examined an allegation that organs may be being harvested from Falun Gong practitioners, who are killed by the harvesting process.

Canadians are going to China for transplants from Calgary, Toronto, Vancouver, and some other cities, and the numbers are increasing. Canadians have been involved in this matter. Mr. Matas

points out that the organ market in China is determined by supply and demand. The supply is local to China, but the demand is in large part foreign. Matas says, "We must do everything we can to end this demand," and I agree. I want to know why the Chinese government would seem to be grossly persecuting them and what we can do as politicians and human beings to address this matter. At the very least, I would suggest that we set aside an information session to discuss the matter with knowledgeable experts.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

2007 Canada Winter Games

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past Saturday the 2007 Canada Winter Games wrapped up in the Yukon. More than 250 young Albertans made the trek north for our country's premier multisport event for developing athletes. These young Albertans battled minus 30 weather and some intense competition to reach their goal, a third-place finish right behind traditional powers Quebec and Ontario. Our athletes stood on the podium 79 times, and this includes 24 gold medals. They dominated in traditional strengths like Nordic and alpine skiing and long-track speed skating, but they also surprised by winning many medals in archery and fencing.

Team Alberta's performance shows yet again just how strong the sport development network is in our province. As the MLA appointee to the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks & Wildlife Foundation I'm pleased to report that annual funding to the ASRPW is helping to achieve these excellent results. With this funding Alberta's sport development network continues to build athletes that are ready to take the next step to the international stage. You'll be hearing from Team Alberta 2007 athletes again in the near future as many of them will soon move to World Cup circuits competing for Team Canada. Some will even be in Vancouver in 2010 as Canada's Olympians.

Behind each athlete is a great team, that helps them be their best. The coaches, officials, and mission staff, who are also part of Team Alberta, deserve to be recognized for their efforts.

Mr. Speaker, with pride I ask the members of this House to join me in one final congratulations to Team Alberta 2007. Thank you.

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

2007 Winter Special Olympics

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to congratulate the 435 athletes, their parents, coaches, and volunteers who participated in the 2007 Winter Special Olympics. I was privileged to attend the opening ceremony of the games along with the Honourable Lieutenant Governor, the Premier, representatives from the federal government, and also my colleague the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays. I also want to commend the many individuals from Calgary-East who assisted in hosting the games at the Max Bell arena. It would not have been possible without your commitment and hard work.

Through Special Olympics athletes develop sport skills, social skills, and self esteem, which assist them in becoming actively involved in recreational, educational, and employment opportunities in their communities. Special Olympics are focused on promoting a more active lifestyle and better quality of life for persons with disabilities through their participation in sport.

Special Olympics Alberta offers programs in 114 communities around the province through 32 affiliates, each with its own

volunteer management committee and volunteer coaches. There are over 1,200 volunteers working with over 3,000 athletes in 15 official sports in year-round programs.

Special Olympics continues to be a success because of the tremendous attitude and commitment of athletes and exceptional dedication of the volunteers. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Bell Canada Partnership with Olds College

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge a great collaboration between a private-sector company and Olds College. On Friday, March 9, Bell Canada and Olds College announced a partnership to create a state-of-the-art distributed learning facility at the Olds College campus. I want to commend the gracious support of Bell Canada. This company contributed \$3.1 million to facilitate the construction of a new community learning campus.

As the MLA for the constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills I'm excited to have the chance to express my constituents' enthusiasm for this great development. The Bell e-learning centre is a great way to connect Albertans to the SuperNet. The linking advances education, research, and training. I'm encouraged that Albertans will soon benefit from this partnership, and I hopefully anticipate that we will see further initiatives such as this in the innovation and technology field.

The new Bell e-learning centre will create many educational opportunities for rural Albertans. They will now be connected to an ever-changing international community and can take advantage of their access to information. The advantages of this project will be recognized for years to come.

I want to applaud Bell's commitment to Alberta and to their partnership with the Alberta government in building the SuperNet.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

2:50

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

Greenhouse Gas Intensity Targets

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government continues to try to confuse Albertans by talking about greenhouse gas intensity targets while European nations and American states and even other provinces are forging ahead with actual reductions. It's time for this government to be transparent and accountable on the issue of greenhouse gas intensity targets. Canada has the seventh highest per capita greenhouse gas emissions in the world. In 2004 Alberta released over 100 million tonnes of greenhouse gases into the air, and six of the top 10 industrial emitters in Canada come from this province. The government should admit to Albertans that intensity targets will do nothing to change this situation.

The Premier is talking about emissions intensity when we should be taking action cleaning up our coal-fired generators and instituting a moratorium on new tar sands project approvals. British Columbia has just announced plans to cut total emissions to 10 per cent below 1990 levels by 2020. France has committed to 80 per cent reductions by 2050, and Germany plans to reduce total emissions by 40 per cent. They're building their green economies while we're stalling with intensity targets.

Worst of all, the government is trying to pull the wool over the eyes of Albertans. Government press releases on March 7 and 8 claim that Alberta is the "first province to legislate greenhouse gas reductions" when, in fact, we are legislating only intensity. At the

end of the day this means more greenhouse gases into the atmosphere.

It's time for the government to be transparent and to admit that greenhouse gases will continue to increase under their plan and get on with the business of reducing greenhouse gas emissions in absolute terms.

Thank you.

head:

Notices of Motions

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

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In accordance with Standing Order 30 I wish to give notice that at the appropriate time I intend to move that the ordinary business of the Assembly be adjourned in order that we may hold an emergency debate on a matter of urgent public importance; namely, the imminent risk to the health and safety of residents resulting from the failure of the privately owned Holy Cross centre in Calgary to meet provincial standards of care, including the number of qualified staff required to meet basic requirements.

Thank you.

head:

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Bill 9

Tourism Levy Amendment Act, 2007

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 9, the Tourism Levy Amendment Act, 2007. This being a money bill, His Honour the Honourable Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

[Motion carried; Bill 9 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Bill 10

Horned Cattle Purchases Act Repeal Act

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to request leave to introduce and move first reading of Bill 10, the Horned Cattle Purchases Act Repeal Act.

This bill will repeal the Horned Cattle Purchases Act, which levied a penalty on each head of horned cattle purchased in Alberta or shipped out of Alberta. The penalty was designed to prevent damage to cattle during transport. Current commercial practices and market expectations promote dehorning, making the Horned Cattle Purchases Act no longer relevant to the cattle industry.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 10 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to move that Bill 10 be moved on the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill on behalf of the hon. Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry.

Bill 12

Income and Employment Supports Amendment Act, 2007

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to move first reading of the Income and Employment Supports Amendment Act, 2007.

[Motion carried; Bill 12 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that Bill 12 be moved on the Order Paper to appear under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

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

Bill 13

Access to the Future Amendment Act, 2007

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce and move Bill 13, the Access to the Future Amendment Act, 2007.

This bill deals with minor amendments to the Access to the Future Act, which is designed to support initiatives to enhance access, affordability, and quality for the postsecondary system. It also establishes and governs the access to the future fund. As our government continues to operationalize the access to the future fund, a number of minor amendments are required for clarity, flexibility, and to allow for the implementation of the fund.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 13 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 13 be moved to Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

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

Bill 14

Pandemic Response Statutes Amendment Act, 2007

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today and request leave to introduce first reading of Bill 14, the Pandemic Response Statutes Amendment Act, 2007.

The proposed amendments will strengthen and clarify the legislative framework in place to support pandemic and emergency preparedness in Alberta. These amendments will ensure that government is able to respond effectively to a public health emergency. I move first reading of Bill 14.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 14 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 14 be moved on the Order Paper to appear under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

**Bill 15
Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution
Amendment Act, 2007**

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 15, the Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Amendment Act, 2007.

This bill is designated as a direct result of what we heard from children who have survived sexual exploitation as well as from their families, front-line workers, and the police. The bill is designated to enhance services to victims of child sexual exploitation. It also provides continued support for those who need it to deal with the complex issues facing sexually exploited children and youth.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 15 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 15 be moved on the Order Paper to appear under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Food.

3:00

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to table five copies of the manager's report of Livestock Identification Services Ltd. for the fiscal year ended March 31, 2006. This report incorporates the Brand Act, the Livestock Identification and Brand Inspection Act, the Livestock and Livestock Products Act, and the Stray Animals Act, all required tablings by statute.

Additionally, Mr. Speaker, I am tabling five copies of the response to Written Question 35, which was accepted in this Assembly on August 28, 2006.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations I would like to table a letter from the Prime Minister of Canada to our Premier outlining his commitment to not include nonrenewable resources in the equalization formula.

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

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to table five copies of a letter written by Ron White of the Calgary community of Arbour Lake to his MLA, the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports, which he copied me, drawing our attention to the plight of seniors in Calgary and across the province and urging an emergency debate.

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

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings. The first one is from my constituent Ian Greenwald. He had a highway motor vehicle accident back in April 2005, a very serious accident, and he has two major issues. The compensation for general damages in his case is approximately \$4,000 under the current legislation, and he's urging this government to change this legislation and compensate his family as soon as possible.

The second one is again from a constituent, Matt Gosse. He has expressed support for 100 per cent smoke-free legislation in Alberta. It is the responsibility of the government to take a leadership role on this issue and serve the best end, which is the health of all Albertans.

Thank you.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table a copy of a press release provided to me by Joe Anglin, who is working with a citizens' group in central Alberta that is formally calling upon former Premier Ralph Klein to testify under oath about his former government's involvement in the orchestrated planning of two new 500 kV transmission lines.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'm pleased to table today the appropriate number of copies of a brochure that we have produced. The title of the brochure is Page Biographies, Third Session, spring sitting, 26th Legislature. I sincerely hope that you'll have an opportunity to take a look at these remarkable young people who serve as pages for us and look at a bit of their backgrounds. I mean, we're talking about grade 10 students, grade 11 students, grade 12 students, some of whom are already rather seasoned, and it's quite amazing to see what kind of professions and vocations and futures they want to have. I really won't make too much of a comment other than to say that no member of this Assembly will be allowed to take out to any golf course without my permission the page who has a 1.4 handicap.

head: **Request for Emergency Debate**

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre and Official Opposition House Leader, you are going to act on behalf of your leader with respect to the Standing Order 30 application?

Holy Cross Long-term Care Centre

Ms Blakeman: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to proceed on behalf of my colleague the Leader of the Official Opposition. Notice of the Standing Order 30 has been circulated to members of the Assembly, and my colleague the Leader of the Official Opposition did give appropriate oral notice earlier in Routine. As well, I note that we did file, as required, copies in advance of the time limits that are set out with the Speaker's office.

A brief outline of the situation. Forty-two long-term care residents of the Holy Cross centre located in Calgary, which provides both assisted living and long-term care services, are being transferred to other facilities because the facility does not meet fire safety codes or provincial standards of care. The Holy Cross centre does not currently have a director of care, so there are concerns about the skill level of the facility staff.

I note that as always with requests for a Standing Order 30 permission to hold an emergency debate, the test is the urgency of

why we are requesting that for today. I think that the underlying issue of great importance here – that is, the forced evacuation of seniors for glaring violations of care and safety standards and, I note, fire codes – certainly meets that standard of urgency. *Marleau and Montpetit* 584 and *Beauchesne* 389 both reference the importance of the matter themselves. I think that when we have a situation where vulnerable people who are not in a position to protect themselves are placed at risk, that becomes a very urgent issue for this Assembly. I think the issue takes on even greater significance because the Assembly was promised by the government that these problems would be fixed in the wake of the Auditor General's report that was presented in May of 2005 and that the government answered in the fall of 2005.

Now, Standing Order 30(7) requires this to be a “genuine emergency” that requires “immediate and urgent consideration,” and I think that risk to the lives and health and safety of seniors is a genuine emergency. Not all of the seniors will be moved out for a number of weeks because they are trying to find accommodation for them, so the danger and the risk remain.

There are two additional urgencies that are created here, Mr. Speaker. There is a domino effect. In trying to move those seniors into other accommodation, they are now shifting the existing lists of seniors who are looking for urgent and immediate placement in long-term care. We've now added 42 of those people onto the list, competing with everyone else, and that creates some pretty dire circumstances for those looking for urgent placement.

In addition, other residents are being left in place at the Holy Cross centre; therefore, I would argue that their risk is increased. These are the people in supported living, or assisted living, situations, which may not fall directly under the purview of the Minister of Health and Wellness. Mr. Speaker, these are not spry people. We have now got people left in place where there is a concern about adherence to a fire code, and they may not be able to leap up in the middle of the night and get themselves out of that facility, especially when we're looking at a lack of facility staff in there. So I argue that this is of such an urgent nature that we need to take this argument up today.

Although I have described the issue as being ongoing, I would argue that it is not chronic. In this situation it is specific to this one facility, and it is a failure to meet specific criteria. In this case it is the fire code violations, which have been brought to light by the Calgary fire department. They notified the Calgary health region of the issues, and the Calgary health region took additional steps because of the lack of staff.

Now, *Beauchesne* 387 requires that the issue be “within the administrative competence of the Government,” and that is certainly so. We have legislation in place in Alberta governing the operation of these facilities, and we've also had an extensive Auditor General's report on it. This is not a general “maladministration of a department,” which is spoken of in *Beauchesne* 394. It is a specific failure to monitor and enforce a particular situation. The staff shortage issue and the director of care issue are not currently before the courts.

The issue of long-term care was mentioned so generally in the throne speech as to be not meaningful in this particular reference. It's talking about making supports “available to seniors as the population ages,” so it is so general as to not be applicable to this particular circumstance. There is no government bill on the Order Paper covering this. The government media release of the 2nd of March outlining the session agenda does not cover anything specific to long-term care or seniors' housing. There is no private member's public bill or private bill that would cover this, as far as we are aware, that has been presented to the House.

3:10

We have a release date that is known for the budget, April 19, but that, I would argue, is not meeting an urgency test to allow us time for meaningful debate. We have no idea when the actual ministries covered by this would be up for debate, so we might well be weeks and weeks away. A supplementary supply budget, which might address this issue – there is nothing available in that which does. There are no government motions on the Order Paper, and under Motions other than Government Motions, again, none that we can find. We did ask two questions in Oral Question Period, but you yourself, Mr. Speaker, have been very clear with us that question period is not the time for debate, and indeed there are admonitions not to engage or provoke debate through question period.

We would argue that we have met the tests of urgency for the Standing Order 30 motion that is brought before you today, allowing us to hold a special debate on the health and safety of these residents at the Holy Cross centre.

Thank you for the opportunity to raise these issues with you, and I hope we will meet the tests that are set out.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under section 30, the Standing Order which allows for the adjournment of the normal business of the House to discuss a matter of urgent and pressing necessity, clearly, there are a few things that have to be addressed in terms of the question of what makes it urgent. The fact that the issue at hand, the issue of concern, is of utmost importance and concern does not necessarily meet the urgency test. I think we can all agree in the House that whenever you have a situation such as currently is the situation at the Holy Cross in Calgary and the actions that are being taken by the Calgary health authority with respect to that particular facility and the people there, that is a very important occurrence. Those are very important steps that are being taken.

I might go further to say that they actually show that the system works, that it is not a matter of urgent necessity but, rather, a demonstration of appropriate action. There was an inspection made by the fire and safety codes people, and there were some deficiencies noted and brought to the attention of the owners of the facility. Since that time the fire and safety people as well as the Calgary regional health authority, I am informed, have been working with the owner to make sure that the facility is safe. If there was a concern that it was unsafe for the residents on an immediate and dangerous basis, I'm sure there would have been a request for either immediate action or immediate evacuation.

In fact, that's not the case. In fact, they've put in place appropriate measures to ensure the safety of the residents. The Calgary health authority has now moved to say that they would like to have more things done and more things taken care of, and in order to accommodate that, they have indicated that they want to move out 42 residents from the long-term care facility.

That is very important. Absolutely. But is it a matter of urgent and pressing necessity for which the House should be adjourned on a day when we will be discussing private members' business in order to have a debate in the House? I would argue that it doesn't meet the urgency test.

The hon. Opposition House Leader went through the litany of what's on the Order Paper and what opportunities there will be for debate of important broad issues. In fact, there are opportunities. We just heard the Speech from the Throne, and the response to the Speech from the Throne is a perfectly valid time to raise issues of concern on any area that was either included or not included in the Speech from the Throne that the opposition or any other member of

the House feels should be included. So debate in response to the Speech from the Throne is a perfectly appropriate time to raise issues of concern.

Supplementary supply. Health and Wellness has a supply issue in supplementary supply. We'll be in Committee of Supply tomorrow, and it's open to any member of the House to argue that rather than using the supply that's being asked for for the purposes being requested, it could be used for other purposes. So there is an opportunity for debate tomorrow in Committee of Supply. There will be opportunity for debate because as hon. members know because of the projected government business last week, interim supply will be introduced tomorrow and available in committee on Wednesday and Thursday. So there will be two days in which we're in interim supply, again, which could be used to address issues of whether resources need to be available or whether a policy change needs to be made.

I think it's fair to point out that there are in the next few days many opportunities, whether it's in reply to the throne speech, whether it's Committee of Supply on interim estimates, whether it's Committee of Supply on supplementary estimates or, in fact, the appropriation bills which will follow those, in which issues can be raised before the House. It's certainly always the subject matter of debates as to whether or not, first of all, the resources of Albertans are being used in the most appropriate manner or whether there's a more urgent place for those resources to be used and, of course, the corollary discussion of whether the policies are appropriate or whether some steps should be taken.

I want to be clear that the concern with respect to Holy Cross and the actions that are being taken with respect to the 42 long-term care residents are very important concerns. They're being dealt with by the Calgary regional health authority, who has the contract with the owners of that facility and who is charged with monitoring that and, in fact, has been monitoring it, has been working with it, has been dealing with it, and is dealing with it. The steps that need to be taken are being taken.

I would suggest that there's no urgency to pre-empt the ordinary business of the House to debate something which is already being done and done appropriately rather than dealing with the regular issues of the House. The urgency has not been demonstrated. The importance is clear. The urgency is what is required to meet the Standing Order 30 test, and the urgency is clearly not there, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 30(2) says that "the Member may briefly state the arguments in favour of the request for leave and the Speaker may allow such debate as he or she considers relevant to the question of urgency" and then shall rule.

We have recognized the Government House Leader in response to the petition from the Official Opposition House Leader. Are there additional members who would like to participate? Well, we'll recognize, first of all, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona and then the hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to the motion before the House pursuant to Standing Order 30, which calls on the House to adjourn the ordinary business of the House to discuss matters of urgent public importance.

I'm going to speak in support of this motion, but first please allow me for a moment to thank you for your congratulations on the anniversary of those members who were elected 10 years ago. This member, for Edmonton-Strathcona, was one of them, and I'm wearing the lapel. Thank you very much for that very thoughtful gesture on your part. Also, I would like to take this opportunity to

thank the constituents of Edmonton-Strathcona, who have supported this member over the last three elections to enjoy this privilege and honour to represent them here.

Mr. Speaker, I celebrated this 10th anniversary yesterday by participating in a public meeting in a park in the heart of the beautiful city of Lethbridge, where citizens gathered to call on this government to implement at least the Kyoto-related greenhouse gas reduction targets.

Now, turning to the motion, there are two requirements that have to be met: the procedural requirements and the criterion of urgency. On the procedural side, Mr. Speaker, I just want to confirm to the House that the New Democratic Party opposition received the notice of this motion in a timely fashion. *Beauchesne* at 387 says that a debate under this Standing Order must deal with a specific question that requires urgent consideration, and it must be "within the administrative competence of the Government and there must be no other reasonable opportunity for debate."

Mr. Speaker, this motion certainly meets these criteria. As all members of this House know, it is the government's responsibility to establish and enforce standards of care in long-term facilities. I know that the government is acutely aware of this responsibility because they have suffered tremendous political pressure since information about the appalling lack of standards and support in our long-term care facilities became public. This motion also deals with a very specific concern; namely, the lack of properly enforced standards at the privately owned Holy Cross centre in Calgary.

3:20

I would note that in accordance with *Beauchesne* 390, Mr. Speaker, there is no other opportunity on the Order Paper for us to deal with this matter in an urgent and careful manner, and per *Beauchesne* 391 this issue with the Holy Cross centre is not under adjudication by a court of law. *Marleau and Montpetit* make a similar observation. I won't go into detail on that one.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I would like to make a few very brief comments on the matter of urgency. Obviously, the most pressing reason for urgency is that extremely vulnerable people at Holy Cross are being affected by the lack of standards. We also know that while the Calgary health region is moving long-term care residents out of the facility, residents in the assisted living areas of the facility are staying put because the Calgary health region has no authority over residential services. I am sure that over the weekend many members of the House read the heartbreaking media accounts of elderly couples being separated because of the moves. The fact that residents have had to pay an increase for such poor services adds insult to injury.

It is clear, Mr. Speaker, that the recommendations of the Auditor General in his report on long-term care have not been implemented, and this House has a responsibility to get to the bottom of why this failure has occurred. I can't help but think that many of these problems are a direct result of this government's push towards the privatization of health services and assisted living facilities rather than long-term care centres.

Mr. Speaker, to conclude, I just want to remind the House that in a similar situation in May of 2005 this House agreed to have a debate about long-term care standards after a motion pursuant to the same order was introduced by the leader of the NDP opposition.

I think that in light of that precedent which the House set less than two years ago as well as the arguments made under the procedures criteria and the urgency requirement, the House needs to support this motion, and I urge all members to do so.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While I, too, would say that these issues are always of significant importance, especially to those individuals impacted by this at the Holy Cross, this is not a matter of urgency specifically as it pertains to Standing Order 30, that would require dismissal of the business of the day.

To speak first, if you're talking about standards, the things that we set in place – legislation, regulations, standards, procedures, mechanisms, monitoring, all of those which come under the purview of this Legislative Assembly – this same topic has been under tremendous debate for years and continues to be under that kind of debate and has had this profile in this Legislative Assembly for some time.

There was a task force, Achieving Excellence in Continuing Care, co-chaired by the members for Lacombe-Ponoka, Calgary-Foothills, and Lethbridge-East. The opposition party worked very closely on the standards for continuing care, and tremendous work was accomplished by that committee. This was clearly in response to the Auditor General's comments on various concerns raised about this issue in years gone by. A committee was formed last year, in May, in response to that task force. There was a response by the government for updating those standards. Also, additional monies were put in place to continue to provide for some of the urgent demands in this sector. So when you talk about the standards, having worked with the Long Term Care Association and with all the various bodies associated with this, new standards are going to be fully implemented by April of this year.

The Auditor General's report and update as well on this exact topic talk about 11 recommendations: three on satisfactory progress, eight on some others that he's going to monitor yet through this year. What it does say is that there's been progress made on all of these standards for specific application of monitoring so that we do have good structures in place.

In specific relation to this issue with the Holy Cross, as one facility it is a very important matter, but the appropriate methodologies have been followed. Like the Minister of Health and Wellness talked about, there is a clinical director on-site to oversee patient care in response to the health authority ensuring that the standards are being met. So there is compliance, and there has been evidence that the monitoring is working.

In response to the facility itself, the fire safety issues, there is no imminent risk to those in that facility today. Their lives are not in peril. There is additional personnel to monitor any fire safety issues to ensure that every person's life is pre-eminent as to what is being followed. The public can rest assured that that has been worked on today with regard to the specific issue that their lives are safe, that the appropriate authorities have investigated and ensured through this transition that there would be no safety issues or peril for those individuals there.

The Speaker: I take it that's the extent of our participants with respect to this motion, so I'll now deal with this question. I am prepared to rule on this. This is the first such motion of its type in this session, so I'm just going to remind members that an application under Standing Order 30 is "to adjourn the ordinary business of the Assembly to discuss a matter of urgent public importance."

First of all, the chair confirms that the Leader of the Official Opposition gave proper notice of his intention to bring a motion under Standing Order 30. Notice was received by my office this morning at 10:40, and the subject matter was provided at that time.

Therefore, the requirements under Standing Order 30(1) have been met. I would like to remind members that Standing Order 30(1) requires notice to be provided "at least 2 hours prior to the sitting of the Assembly." If the changes to the Standing Orders are approved this evening, then starting tomorrow, notice of these types of applications will have to be provided to my office by 11 a.m.

Secondly, before the question as to whether this motion should proceed to be put to the Assembly, the chair must determine whether the motion meets the requirement of Standing Order 30(7), which requires that the matter proposed for discussion is related to "a genuine emergency, calling for immediate and urgent consideration."

The Leader of the Official Opposition's proposed motion is to hold an emergency debate on "the health and safety of residents resulting from the failure of the privately owned Holy Cross Centre in Calgary to meet provincial standards of care." The relevant parliamentary authorities on the topic of emergency debates are *Beauchesne*, paragraphs 387 to 398, and the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, pages 587 to 589. Several participants referred to some of these.

The chair has listened attentively to the submissions of all members participating in the debate. Two factors here were that the chair was interested in learning how this alleged situation met the criteria for genuine emergency and, second, that the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition was essentially inviting the Assembly to defer consideration of Bill 201 standing in his name to debate the purported emergency.

After hearing the arguments put forward and the review that the chair has undertaken since receiving this submission several hours ago, the chair does not believe that this request meets the requirements under the standing order for an emergency debate to proceed. Some of the arguments given have already been presented. The chair does not doubt the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition's sincerity, but it's difficult to conclude that there is something so extraordinary as to constitute a genuine emergency as required under Standing Order 30(7).

To reiterate, while the member raises a serious matter, the chair does not consider it to be of such urgency to warrant postponing the business of the Assembly this afternoon. Therefore, the request for leave is not in order.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Written Questions**

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I move that written questions stand and retain their places.

[Motion carried]

head: **Motions for Returns**

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I move that motions for returns stand and retain their places.

[Motion carried]

head: 3:30 **Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Second Reading**

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition and Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Bill 201
Funding Alberta's Future Act

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great privilege for me to rise today to debate in second reading the flagship bill of the Official Opposition, the Alberta Liberal caucus. In our view, this is the kind of bill that restructures everything in this province in some way or another. It restructures how government will finance itself, it restructures how we as a society in Alberta treat our nonrenewable resources, and most importantly it restructures the future to put it on a basis of stability and prosperity, on a basis of permanently competitive taxes and outstanding public services forever.

Right now Albertans have an incredible opportunity to build a legacy for the future. The Alberta Liberals' vision for the future is the finest public services, the lowest taxes in Canada, the best postsecondary education, an outstanding life for all, and with the right strategy we can start building that future right now, Mr. Speaker. The right strategy is to pass Bill 201, the Funding Alberta's Future Act, which sets aside 30 per cent of annual nonrenewable resource revenues to rebuild the heritage fund, erase the infrastructure debt, and create a series of endowments to provide sustainable, significant additional funding – and I emphasize: additional funding – for postsecondary education and the arts, humanities, and social sciences.

Mr. Speaker, we are not alone in believing that the Alberta Liberal plan to fund Alberta's future is the right thing to do, and I hope all members take note of some of its support. For example, in an editorial last September, just a few months ago, none other than Mr. Paul Stanway, now the Premier's director of communications, wrote, and I quote: the Grits are proposing boosting the heritage trust fund to \$120 billion over the next 15 years, so when the oil and gas money runs out, the province can use interest from the fund to replace nonrenewable energy revenues; it's simple, it's achievable, and it's likely the prescription for the future most Albertans want. End quote.

During his bid for the leadership of the PC Party the hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development, who's waving at me right now, advocated saving 30 per cent of resource revenues, just as this bill proposes. Last year none other than former Premier Peter Lougheed wrote, and I quote: in my view, the best course of action by the provincial government would be to rebuild the Alberta heritage savings trust fund by once again allocating by an act of the Legislature 30 per cent of all oil and gas revenues, including our share of oil sands net profits, to the fund. End quote.

One Mr. Jim Dinning, whose leadership bid was endorsed by about 40 Tory MLAs sitting in the Assembly, said that he would save 30 per cent of resource revenues during normal times and 50 per cent during boom times.

So, Mr. Speaker, support for the Alberta Liberal plan to save these precious nonrenewable revenues is widespread even within the Tory caucus and staff. This alone should, I expect, lead to quick passage of this landmark bill. But if this evidence of support isn't enough to convince you of the bill's merit, consider what this bill can do for Albertans. The 30 per cent of resource revenues we plan to save will be allocated to bring the most benefits to the most Albertans.

First, the act will enable the government to retire its huge infrastructure debt within just a few years by using a portion of the savings to build or refurbish new schools, hospitals, roads, and on and on and on. Retiring the infrastructure debt is more than a matter of balancing books. Retiring that debt means safer and more efficient roads, better and more accessible health care, well-maintained schools and, I might add, more of them, and safe, reliable water and sewer systems, services, and facilities that Albertans once

took for granted that the Conservative government has allowed to crumble. Paying off our infrastructure debt is the right thing to do because Albertans deserve better from their government, and they deserve infrastructure that works.

We will use 35 per cent of resource revenue savings to build a phenomenal postsecondary endowment fund. This fund will reach \$15 billion by 2020-21, generating in today's value \$790 million a year, assuming a net return of 5 per cent per year. To put that in perspective, \$790 million in new annual funding would represent a huge boost in funding to postsecondary education. For example, \$790 million is 49 per cent of the total grants given to all institutions in the 2006-07 budget. It is more, Mr. Speaker, than all the tuition paid by Alberta students in 2006.

By 2021 earnings from the postsecondary endowment fund will significantly increase by 36 per cent, in fact: in real terms, Alberta's total investment in postsecondary education. This will enable us to enhance and maintain world-class institutions, putting Albertans at the forefront of innovation. It will also enable us to strengthen our network of postsecondary institutions, making excellent postsecondary education available to all Albertans regardless of education and career goals. The postsecondary endowment fund will help fuel Alberta's continuing transition to a knowledge-based economy and will help fulfill our goal of truly outstanding education.

The \$500 million humanities, social sciences, and arts endowment fund will generate \$28 million per year toward supporting and sustaining an exceptional quality of life in Alberta. This fund will reinvigorate and sustain these important contributors to community, to quality of life, to knowledge, and to the economy. Alberta, frankly, under this government has neglected support for these areas. This fund will redress that erosion of support and go far beyond, providing sustainable, reliable funding to programs, research and scholarship, teaching, and to community service.

Once the humanities, social sciences, and arts endowment fund reaches its cap of \$500 million, this slice of the pie will then be funnelled into an opportunity fund for Albertans. Within 15 years this opportunity fund will be worth \$1.7 billion in today's terms, generating annual returns to be paid out of about \$84 million. We will work with Albertans to decide what this fund should be used for, whether that's rural development, renewable energy, citizens' dividends. The possibilities are limited only by Albertans' imaginations.

Mr. Speaker, the centrepiece, the most vital aspect of this legislation is its ability to reinvigorate the heritage fund. Of the 30 per cent of resource revenues diverted away from general revenues, 35 per cent will go to the heritage fund. When investments resulting from this act have retired the infrastructure debt, that contribution will then be channelled also to the heritage fund. The total will rise to 60 per cent. This will transform the heritage fund from a much-loved but little understood fund that has been losing real value for decades into a vital contributor to revenue stability for Alberta.

If passed, the Funding Alberta's Future Act will build the heritage fund from its current \$13.4 billion to \$120 billion by 2021. Assuming a 5 per cent real return, this will generate a \$6 billion annual contribution to base revenues and offset declining resource revenues.

A bolstered heritage fund can play an integral role in Alberta's fiscal stability. As resource revenues fall, as this government itself is predicting, income from the heritage fund will rise. This income will stream into general revenues. Through this approach core government spending and programs can be sustained without raising taxes. That means better health care, no further erosion of community and economic infrastructure, stronger municipalities and communities, stronger public education and support for seniors, leveraging our prosperity, protecting and sustaining our natural environment. It means no more tax increases.

At the same time, we will work with Albertans to address their hopes and concerns for the future with the extraordinary resources provided by our other planned endowments. These benefits alone make passing Bill 201 worth while.

3:40

But the most important reason to make this bill law is because it would put Alberta back on a solid fiscal foundation. Right now, Mr. Speaker – and every MLA of every party should be concerned about this – the government uses the revenue from nonrenewable resources to keep the province from sliding into deficit and debt. If resource revenues fall, taxes will have to go up, spending will have to be cut, and the province will return to deficit spending, perhaps all of the above.

During the last few years the government has used precious nonrenewable resource revenues to cover its irresponsible budgeting process. In 2003-04 the government spent 3 and a half billion dollars of Alberta's legacy. By this budget year the government's dependence has grown to a \$5.3 billion dependency on oil and gas revenues.

At this moment the government spends \$8,500 per person to provide public services for Albertans, but if you exclude nonrenewable resource revenue, the government collects only \$6,360 in sustainable revenues. Without our oil and gas revenues, Mr. Speaker, the province would be running huge deficits, and every increase in spending and every tax cut would widen that sustainability gap. We need to replace nonrenewable resource revenues with another source of funding before oil and gas revenues decline too far. The Funding Alberta's Future Act, if passed, sustains core government revenues without raising taxes even while resource revenues fall, and it does what every financial planner tells her clients: pay yourself first.

Norway, starting long after Alberta, has set aside a public endowment of more than \$230 billion, and it grows dramatically now every month, Mr. Speaker, generating incredible advantages for their small population. Even Alaska is way ahead of Alberta, with a balance of \$33 billion U.S.

Since 1978 this government has collected \$123 billion in resource revenues, not adjusting for inflation. Just over 91 per cent of that money was used to repay the debt and for annual spending. A mere 8.9 per cent was saved, Mr. Speaker. It's time for Alberta to get responsible again with public money. The future is incredibly bright but only if we plan for it.

In summary, Mr. Speaker, if passed, the Funding Alberta's Future Act enables Albertans to pay themselves first and to make smart provisions for the future. It will provide stable base revenues despite falling resource revenues without raising taxes and provide the capacity for stable base spending without abandoning the responsibilities of government. Bill 201 gives government and citizens a clear direction for the future, a goal we can work toward together. It sets benchmarks for achievement, it creates financial stability and sustainability, it gives the heritage fund a clear purpose and a vital role to play in our daily life, and it reduces our dependence on nonrenewable resources. It's a bill that will at long last bring some purpose and direction to governance and financial planning in Alberta. But perhaps most importantly it's something that Albertans can reach for together, uniting us in a noble, achievable purpose.

In short, Mr. Speaker, we're building a legacy – at least, we want to build a legacy – that will benefit everyone in Alberta. That legacy will only be built if all members of the Assembly support Bill 201. Therefore, I urge all of us in this Assembly to do so.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, there's opportunity now for hon. members to participate. I have an indication of a number of members, and I'm quite prepared at this point in time to go through a list of seven or eight or nine or 10 to give you some idea as to when you might be up this afternoon if I had some idea of the members who would like to participate. I already have a note from the Opposition House Leader, so that helps me with that one, but who would like to participate? The hon. leader. Okay.

Well, then we'll go with the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, followed by the hon. leader of the third party, and then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie. Did I see some other hands up? The hon. Government House Leader, then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre if I can remember that.

The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, followed by the hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to join the debate on Bill 201, Funding Alberta's Future Act, brought forth by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview. Among many things, if this bill is passed, it seeks to have the Minister of Finance introduce a bill to establish a funding Alberta's future account of the general revenue fund and put 30 per cent of all nonrenewable resource revenues into this account.

Revenues put into this account would be allocated to the following areas: 35 per cent to the heritage savings trust fund; 35 per cent to the postsecondary endowment fund, which would replace the access to the future fund; 25 per cent to the capital account; and 5 per cent directed to a humanities, social sciences, and arts endowment fund. If the fund were to reach \$500 million, revenue would be directed to an opportunity fund, which has a yet-to-be-determined purpose.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has already decided exactly where Albertans' savings should go without referring to any sort of consultation to date. Now, in the hon. member's speech he referred to the possibility of dividends. I don't know. We might call those Riverview bucks. I guess that's encouraging, that there might be some future consultation with Albertans.

I'm concerned with section 4 of the Funding Alberta's Future Act, and it reads as follows:

In the Bill introduced under section 2, the Access to the Future Fund established under the Access to the Future Act shall be replaced by the Post-secondary Education Endowment Fund.

Now, I'm having a hard time figuring out why the access to the future fund needs to be replaced.

The postsecondary education fund, Mr. Speaker. I believe its objectives are as follows:

- (a) support the excellence of the post-secondary system . . . including the areas of pure and applied research, teaching and community service,
- (b) increase the accessibility of the post-secondary system . . .
- (c) [render] post-secondary education more affordable for students, and
- (d) support the continued development of apprenticeship and training programs.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to discuss what the access to the future fund, as we now know it, aims to accomplish. It is intended to provide an investment in innovations within the postsecondary system; support of improved learner outcomes; faculty, staff, and graduate student development, attraction, and retention; support of knowledge and technology transfer; and, very importantly, affordability.

As you can see, Mr. Speaker, the funds have almost identical goals. The access to the future fund provides matching grants to stimulate private, industry, corporate, and other contributions from the public. The fund engages other sectors to invest in education.

Such partnerships are very valuable to a successful postsecondary education system. The fund was just created, less than two years ago, and in that short time frame the government of Alberta has committed to support the China Institute at the University of Alberta, matching a donation of some \$37.3 million; the province-wide Lois Hole Campus Alberta digital library initiative, with start-up costs of \$30 million; and the Schulich School of Engineering at the University of Calgary, matching a donation of \$25 million.

3:50

Mr. Speaker, when comparing the access to the future fund and the proposed postsecondary endowment fund, it is clear that they both have the very same purpose: to further education in Alberta. I think the hon. member should be commended for his support of good government initiatives. Since the current fund, which Bill 201 proposes to eliminate, has virtually the same goal as the proposed new replacement fund, it is unclear as to why it would be necessary to eliminate the current fund in the first place. Perhaps the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview would simply prefer to see a name change of the access to the future fund. As long as we achieve real results for Alberta students, it should not matter what the fund is called. I fail to see the need to duplicate our current fund.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, the access to the future fund is likely superior to the proposed fund because it encourages individuals and the private sector to participate in investing in Alberta's education system and future. This means that the contributions from the fund are actually worth more because of the matching grants that accompany the government of Alberta's funding. Students stand to benefit more with the help of the access to the future fund because they are supported by both the government and the broader community.

Mr. Speaker, I think it would be a complete waste of time to replace the access to the future fund, considering its objectives and great potential for Alberta's future leaders. I urge the members of this Assembly to strongly consider the differences between the two funds before voting on Bill 201. I think it will be clear after prudent study that the current fund meets the current and future needs of Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'm now going to recognize the hon. leader of the third party. But before that, he would be followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, the hon. Government House Leader, the hon. Official Opposition House Leader. Was there another government member who would like to participate here? Well, after the Official Opposition House Leader, then it will be the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, followed then by the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 201, Funding Alberta's Future Act, introduced by the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition. I think it's a great thing that the Leader of the Official Opposition is thinking about the future. I think we all ought to be thinking about the future in this House. I have said repeatedly that I feel that Alberta is now at a crossroads, and we need really to begin thinking about where we want to go as a province.

A couple of years ago people might have thought that we were at a crossroads as a province because we had paid off all of our debt, but I don't believe that that is true, Mr. Speaker, and I also believe that we're at a crossroads because of a number of other factors. It's

not true, because the province has simply transferred our financial debt into a debt of infrastructure, which we estimate at anywhere between \$10 billion and \$20 billion, which now must be paid off and which the government is proposing to pay off through the means of the shell game of P3s, in which private companies will incur the debt on their books and it will be hidden from the people of Alberta and, more importantly, the grassroots of the Conservative Party. I think we're at a crossroads, Mr. Speaker, because of the situation with respect to world oil prices, the world shortage of oil supplies, because of profound climate change that is now taking place and which needs to be addressed.

Now, this particular bill does not mention budget surpluses, but it is structured in a manner to build upon Conservative budgetary practices, that have resulted in the current range of budgetary surpluses. Bill 201 is a variation of the Conservative plan from the 1970s to create the Alberta heritage trust fund. Like Bill 201 the original Conservative plan entailed putting aside 30 per cent of nonrenewable resource income into the Alberta heritage trust fund every year to serve as a sustainable account for capital expenditures.

Mr. Speaker, the Conservative plan disintegrated completely in the 1980s with the collapse of global oil prices. The provincial government slid into debt, unable to balance its budget, and that heritage trust fund atrophied because of declining resource revenues. The 1980s illustrate three weaknesses of this approach: first, the unreliability of the nonrenewable resource sector for long-term fiscal stability; second, Alberta's budgetary overreliance on nonrenewable resource income; and third, the inability of a fund-like approach to work once nonrenewable income has dried up.

Mr. Speaker, we are not against an approach like this in general except that the Liberal plan doesn't deal with the fundamentals of Alberta's budgetary and financial situation. While the Liberals talk about a sustainability gap, this bill does nothing to address that and, in fact, will continue the reliance on nonrenewable resource revenue to pay for ongoing expenditures. This is compounded by the support of the Liberal party for the government's reductions in corporate income tax. We are becoming more and more dependent on nonrenewable resource revenue for ongoing expenditures for the programs that the people of Alberta depend upon.

Now, there are two basic flaws in the approach that is taken here. First of all, it doesn't see the nonrenewable resources for what they are, that is to say nonrenewable and finite. Notwithstanding the tremendous reserves that exist in the tar sands in Alberta, these are finite resources. We must as a province invest in a renewable energy future for this province, and the fund as proposed by the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition doesn't do that. We need a more profound, more basic approach to investment. To do that, we need to ensure that we have the full value of these resources, which are owned by Albertans, coming to Albertans, and that means fundamentally a change in the royalty structure that exists in this province.

It's unacceptable to have 1 per cent royalties charged on oil from the majority of the production from Alberta's tar sands. It's unacceptable to export raw and unprocessed bitumen. We must think big, Mr. Speaker. We need to look at the value of the resources that are slipping through our fingers as we speak and capture that value for the people of Alberta, not just for this generation but for future generations. We need to be thinking about our children and our grandchildren and even our great-grandchildren. There will come a day when we can no longer burn oil and coal for fuel. That decision will not be made in Alberta. That decision will be made for us in the world. We are already lagging behind not just European jurisdictions, not just jurisdictions in Asia, but jurisdictions in the United States.

We need to capture the value of our resources – and that's a

fundamental thing – and then the purpose to which that value is turned needs to be to prepare the economy of this province for the day when oil and coal are no longer usable or no longer have the value that they currently do. In other words, Mr. Speaker, we need to build a green and prosperous future for future generations of this province. We need to build an energy economy in this province that is based on renewable energy, and to that end the Alberta New Democrats are proposing a significantly larger fund, up to perhaps a value of \$20 billion, that would be used to invest in renewable energy and in transforming the Alberta economy into one in which renewable energy is the key engine, something that would guarantee prosperity, not to mention a clean environment for future generations.

4:00

There is nothing in this bill that deals with the use of nonrenewable resource revenue to clean up the environmental mess created by oil and gas production, particularly production in the tar sands in northern Alberta. I am surprised. Of course, the goals of the bill are admirable: to eliminate infrastructure debt, something Alberta New Democrats also support; a postsecondary education endowment fund, a wonderful idea; a humanities, social sciences, and arts endowment fund, also a wonderful idea. But the AEUB estimates that the unfunded liability to clean up the environmental damage even from conventional oil and gas exploration and development in this province is around \$2 billion. There is nothing in the Liberal bill that speaks to this question.

Mr. Speaker, I think there are some wonderful ideas in this, but it's not big thinking. It doesn't look too far to the future. It looks a little bit to the future, but it doesn't look to the horizon. It doesn't think big. The Alberta New Democrats' plan thinks big, looks to the horizon, and thinks about how we want to position Alberta in the next generation so that we can ensure both a clean environment and a prosperous future for our children and grandchildren.

Mr. Speaker, I want to just indicate that while there are some great ideas in this Bill 201, it does not meet the test, in our view, of the vision that's necessary for this province. It doesn't really grapple with the very nature of nonrenewable and finite resources. It assumes that those resources will continue to exist and continue to fund government expenditures. Because of that, because of the position of the government and the Liberal opposition with respect to corporate tax cuts at a time when corporations are earning record profits, we don't think that this bill offers the answer that we need in this province and, as a result, will not support it.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I have eight speakers on my list. The next three will be the following: the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My pleasure to rise this afternoon and speak in strong support of Bill 201, the Funding Alberta's Future Act.

I'm going to lead off my comments by responding to the comments made by the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, in particular my concern with his comment that this plan does nothing to address the need to replace nonrenewable resource revenue with a sustainable source of revenue. I'm not sure that he read the bill because that's exactly what this plan does. That is exactly the intent. It's exactly the way in which it was received by economists and respected businesspeople and any number of organizations across this province when the Official Opposition first released that policy back in September of last year. So while this member may not see

how far this bill goes towards replacing nonrenewable resource revenue, many, many people did, and in fact, as I said, that is exactly what it's intended to do.

Now, I will agree with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood on one point, and that is that the debt in this province is in fact not paid yet. There are many people in this province who are surprised to learn of the amount of debt that we still carry. The current Finance minister when he was the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation said publicly that the infrastructure debt was sitting at somewhere between \$8 billion and \$10 billion and would be \$14 billion soon if we didn't address it. We know for a fact that the unfunded portion of the teachers' pension liability is sitting at \$7 billion more or less and grows every day at great cost to taxpayers and will cost taxpayers somewhere in the order of \$45 billion by the time that agreement is finally paid out in approximately 55 years. So for this government or any friends of this government to argue that they've paid off the debt, it's simply not the case.

I'd like to address the concerns raised by the Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon when he drew some legitimate comparisons to the postsecondary endowment fund that is included in Bill 201 and the access to the future fund, which this government passed some time ago. The biggest single difference for the hon. member is very, very simple, and it's very significant, and that is this: the government's legislation capped the access to the future fund at \$3 billion. They put a ceiling on it. The first thing they did. I spoke loud and vociferously in this House against the idea of putting an artificial ceiling on that fund. So to the hon. member: our fund in this business year alone would have put \$1.427 billion into that fund and another \$1.348 billion next year and similar amounts all the way down the line. By the year 2021 you're looking at almost \$16 billion in that fund as opposed to the paltry \$3 billion that the government has committed to the fund now, and we don't know when we're going to reach that. So that is definitely the biggest single difference.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The fact that you could change the name or that the goals lauded in the bill are similar: of course. The difference is: put your money where your mouth is. That's what this bill does. Remember that this is in addition to the dollars that are already spent on postsecondary. This fund would put \$71 million into the postsecondary endowment fund this year alone. That's the first year of the program. It jumps to \$139 million in the second year and to \$202 million in the third year, and that's in addition to the money that the government is spending on postsecondary right now. So the effects are absolutely dramatic when you relieve the fund from that cap and start putting the money in there. As I say, put your money where your mouth is and really invest in postsecondary education.

I think everybody in this House agrees that a knowledge-based economy is the future of this province. Again to the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood: that is exactly what this does. By funding postsecondary to the extent that this bill would and by ensuring a knowledge-based economy down the road, we relieve ourselves from the dependence on oil and natural gas.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I've been an MLA for about two and a half years now, and I've travelled the province extensively, met with stakeholder groups, whether it be chambers of commerce or Rotary clubs or any number of organizations that we meet with when we're doing caucus outreach trips, met with a number of individuals over that period of time as well, and without any question the number one comment we heard – and I know that the government members heard this too; it was reflected in their leadership review vote back

on April 1 of last year – is that people want a plan. People want something, some sort of a vision, not a three-year plan or a five-year plan, for what this province is going to look like down the road. People want a long-term vision as to how we're going to not only secure a future without oil and gas revenues but make sure that there's something there for our children and our grandchildren as well.

I find it a little ironic, quite frankly, that the Conservative Party then, after having heard this same message that members of the opposition heard and after talking amongst themselves throughout the leadership campaign about the need for a plan, went and elected a new leader, a man who became the Premier, who by his own admission has no plan for savings. In fact, it was in his very first comments as Premier, his first media interview as Premier, where he said literally that he has no plan for the heritage savings trust fund. I must admit to having been incredibly disheartened when I heard the new Premier say that because the need is obvious. Most of the leadership candidates in that race other than the Premier spoke out in favour of some sort of a savings plan, some sort of level in terms of the amount of resource revenues that should be saved.

I know that my colleague from Edmonton-Riverview, the Leader of the Official Opposition, referenced some of them earlier. He talked about the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development, whose plan would have saved 30 per cent of resource revenues, and I tabled a document indicating that in the House last Thursday. He spoke about former Premier Peter Lougheed advocating for 30 per cent of resource revenues being saved and the failed leadership candidate and presumptive Premier Jim Dinning, who talked about saving 30 per cent during regular times and 50 per cent during boom times.

4:10

He didn't have time during his remarks to mention a few of the other leadership candidates, and I'd just like to point these out as well. Mark Norris, who was and is to this day, I guess, a former economic development minister in this Legislature, said in his campaign material that a percentage of budget surpluses will be earmarked for the heritage savings trust fund.

We have the health minister, actually, and this is quite interesting. I'm hoping that the health minister will partake in the debate in a few minutes because I'd like to hear his thoughts on this. I'd like to hear him expand on his thoughts where he said that his priority is that nonrenewable resource revenue should be saved for the future in a manner which can expand our economy, expand our society, and pay dividends long-term into the future. I'm going to assume that the minister of health will be speaking in favour of Bill 201.

Several organizations, as I referenced earlier, have spoken out publicly in favour of the idea of saving some percentage of nonrenewable resource revenues. Just to mention a few, the Canadian Taxpayers Federation: not a group that would necessarily always be thinking or seem to be thinking along the same lines as the Alberta Liberal Party, but they certainly endorse this.

The Canada-West Foundation has done an awful lot of work, and some of that work actually comes from a man by the name of Allan Warrack, who is a former minister with this government, advocating for a savings plan of nonrenewable resource revenue.

The Alberta Chambers of Commerce are strongly supportive in their Vision 2020 document of savings of nonrenewable resource revenue.

The Calgary Chamber of Commerce president, Heather Douglas, said that she strongly recommends saving 30 to 40 per cent of resource revenues. She went on to say, "We believe it will enhance Alberta's competitive advantage." This is coming from the chamber

of commerce in what is arguably the second most important financial centre in the country, and they're strongly recommending that this be done.

Mr. Speaker, in this Legislature last Thursday I asked a question of the Treasury Board minister, but the Finance minister was kind enough to respond. The question was simply: is it true or false that this government relies more on nonrenewable resource revenues to fund its budgeting programs today than it did 10 years ago? To his credit the Finance minister gave the answer that I already knew.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You've heard a lot of the numbers, already. You've heard a lot of the projections as to the amount of money that could be saved, the amount that would be available for reinvestment, the ways in which it could be invested, so I won't go through all of that again because there is much to talk about on this bill. I'll start off very briefly by addressing the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon and then the hon. leader of the third party with some of the concerns that they had.

To the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, first of all, who seemed to have a problem with what we proposed to do with the access to the future fund: if that problem is something that is keeping him up at night, I would simply suggest that at the appropriate time he move an amendment in committee, and I'm sure that we can work together and collaboratively to move this ahead.

To the hon. leader of the third party. Despite what the leader of the third party says, this plan very much does evolve us out of dependency, out of a culture of addiction to nonrenewable resource revenues as a way to pay our daily bills, and though he seems to have a problem with the lack of vision surrounding this bill, I would suggest to you that this bill is full of vision. It just may not be quite as sexy as, on the one hand, getting rich quick or, on the other hand, hanging the rich. I suggest that the hon. leader of the third party leans towards the hanging the rich vision. The government? We don't know. It remains to be seen how things change over the life of this session, but certainly going back to the previous session, the previous order of things, this was a government that ideologically very much shared a vision of getting rich quick.

You know, this vision in Bill 201, Funding Alberta's Future Act, won't get you rich, won't get us rich quick – it's not about how many SUVs you can park in the driveway or how many spots you have in your garage for such vehicles – nor will it hang the rich. Alberta Liberals recognize that in order to prosper over the long term, you need to be able to create wealth and sustain wealth. This is about sustaining wealth.

I was watching television last night – I think it was last night, maybe the night before – Outdoor Life Network. They were doing a nature documentary on Alaska, actually, and they took a moment to focus on the gold rush in the late 1890s in the Klondike. Two hundred and fifty thousand people trekked up that mountainside. You can see it represented on the Alaska licence plate. Two hundred and fifty thousand people desiring to strike it rich, to find gold, trekked up that mountainside. Countless numbers of them died trying to reach the goal. Of those 250,000 would-be prospectors, would-be gold diggers, only 800 ever struck it rich.

This is about broader, deeper, more sustainable wealth. This is about getting us to a position as a province where we have sufficient wealth in our heritage savings trust fund, in our postsecondary education endowment fund, and in our other funds to generate wealth, to generate, as far as the income that the heritage savings trust fund is concerned, sustainable wealth to run the province's

year-over-year, month-over-month, day-to-day operations so that we don't have to take money – \$2,000, roughly, per capita per taxpayer per year – above and beyond what we raise from normal revenue streams, the revenue streams that all other jurisdictions have. We don't have to take from nonrenewable resource revenues and top it up because that's kind of like going to your line of credit every month to supplement your income until one day you wake up and you discover that your line of credit is maxed out and the bank won't give you any more.

I don't spend much time worrying about the prospect of this province running out of oil and gas. I suppose it could happen in my lifetime. I suppose there's a greater chance that it could happen in my children's lifetime. There's probably a very good chance that it could happen in my grandchildren's lifetime if we continued consuming fossil fuels on this planet at the current rate. But you know, Mr. Speaker, that's not going to happen. That's not going to happen.

You may have seen on the weekend that the European Union has decided to make a concerted effort over the next 15 years to generate I think it was 30 per cent of their energy needs from renewable sources. In this province especially we should take that as a warning to adjust our priorities because the way in which we will run out of nonrenewable resource revenues is not because there's no more oil in the ground in Alberta but because the rest of the world isn't interested in buying our oil. So it stays in the ground where it's worth nothing if we can't find somebody to sell it to or something to make out of it that's value-added to put down the pipeline, quote, unquote, to sell to markets elsewhere.

I would come back to the leader of the third party again and suggest that, you know, if he has a problem that we don't have an endowment fund in this particular act, in this particular bill, for renewable energy in some form or other, he could move an amendment there. I don't know how it'll fare in the House, but he could certainly try. I for one would certainly listen to his ideas on that.

Regardless of what you do in the normal course of daily business to promote the development of exportable renewable energy technology and sources that will ultimately replace the nonrenewable energy that we sell around the world, it is vital that we move off our dependence on nonrenewable resource revenues to fund the day-to-day business of living in this great province. This bill, Bill 201, does that and so much more, Mr. Speaker.

4:20

This bill will create, I think, if given half a chance, the world-leading postsecondary education culture. This bill will create an arts, social sciences, and humanities fund, which is the piece of the puzzle in this province that's missing. We endow science. We endow engineering. We endow medicine. We don't endow the social sciences and humanities yet, and we need to do that. As my colleague the Leader of the Official Opposition described so eloquently a few minutes ago, this bill presents an orderly, if completely nonsexy, blueprint for taking care of our infrastructure deficit. But this bill allows this province – and I would invite members of all parties to try to get past their respective ideologies and see the vision – to prosper in perpetuity.

Mr. Speaker, I would urge members of all parties to move amendments to specific clauses in the bill that they may think are not perfect or perhaps aren't perfect. We're human on this side of the House too; we don't get it perfect every time. But I would urge all members to vote in favour of this bill in second reading. We'll take it on to committee. We'll see where it goes from there. We'll work collaboratively, and I think that together we can produce a piece of

legislation that will make for a magnificent 21st century for the province of Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader, followed by the Official Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to rise and enter into debate on Bill 201. I was a little miffed that the hon. Leader of the Opposition in introducing his remarks refused to refer to my leadership campaign platform and the good things that I was suggesting we do, but I'll assume that that was just an oversight and not an intentional slight on his part.

I think, Mr. Speaker, that as part of this debate it's important to reference the good work that's happened. Last year I think was the 25th year of the establishment of the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research. It's a good model. It's a great model. It shows what can happen with foresight, and we are now reaping the benefits in Alberta of that fund having been set up and having grown.

A few years ago the Alberta ingenuity fund, as it's called colloquially, was set up, the engineering and science research fund, and funded to the tune of, I think, \$500 million. Then only a couple of years ago the commitment was made to top up the science and engineering fund, recognizing the value and the power of that fund to Alberta and Albertans, to add to the ingenuity fund, and to establish a fund that I'm very, very proud of: the access to the future fund, and establish it with a clear commitment to having it reach \$3 billion so that on an ongoing basis, when it's fully funded, \$145 million would be available for a number of very significant purposes to advance education in our province.

In setting up that fund and having the debate around Bill 1 at that time that set up that fund, there was clear discussion about whether there should be a cap on the fund and the purposes of the fund. But the reality is that establishing the fund and putting the approximately \$1 billion that's in the fund now has clearly created an appetite in this province for people to make a commitment to advanced education, recognizing that most of the advanced education institutions that are respected around the world as being at the pre-eminence of their field have significant endowment funds behind them.

So I for one am a big proponent of the access to the future fund, and I would freely say that, in my humble opinion, the \$3 billion is a start not a finish. It's a start. It's a place that we should be aiming at and saying that we want to get there. My hope is that we will build such pressure from private donors in the province and from people who value education, who want to see this succeed, that people will be stepping forward and insisting that that fund go above \$3 billion. But it's important to have a target. It's important to have a target in there.

So I wanted to rise and just reference the fact that we have a good start in this province. The heritage savings trust fund is a good start. Now with the debt paid off, the commitment to inflation-proof the heritage savings trust fund, and in the last two years additional tranches of \$1 billion each transferred into that heritage savings trust fund: a good start. The Heritage Foundation for Medical Research, an absolutely stellar model. The ingenuity fund, which is growing into its own as we speak and will be providing in the same manner as the heritage medical research fund did, will be providing real opportunities for the future of Albertans, moving Alberta into a knowledge-based economy, making it possible for us to grow that economy and that society beyond the carbon base that we have now and into a knowledge base in so many fields.

I would agree – in fact, I’ve said it publicly; I said it during the campaign last fall, and I’ll say it again at every opportunity that I have – that we need a third piece to that stool: that humanities, social sciences, and the arts endowment fund. We should have that, in my opinion. That’s not government policy at the moment. But that’s a piece that’s needed because just as we need to advance our knowledge in engineering and science, just as we need to advance our knowledge in medicine, we need to be looking at issues in the social sciences area. We need to be able to do more research than the centre for family research can do with its modest funding now in the area of family violence, in the area of how we help children develop, as well as certainly the other side of that, in supporting the arts and making sure that we understand that the arts are important.

So those are important things that we could move forward to do. I certainly have supported those in the past and will support those in the future. I have supported in the past the idea of an energy and environment endowment, which could be a part of the ingenuity fund or perhaps a rural development endowment, using the money that we obtain today, not income but selling our assets, the oil and gas assets that belong to not just current Albertans but also future Albertans. The money that we get for those assets is a replacement asset and should be treated as such and should be husbanded and should be used as a resource to help build the future of the province.

So in saying all that, I would look at Bill 201 and say that there are some things in here that really bring forward, as the Leader of the Official Opposition in his opening remarks indicated, ideas that have been championed and championed well by members of this government as we talk about the future of the province.

Now, there was some suggestion in remarks earlier that there was a lack of a plan. Mr. Speaker, that offends me because this province has a 20-year strategic plan. That 20-year strategic plan does talk about the future of this province, and it talks about how we need to develop that knowledge-based economy: “Unleashing Innovation; Leading in Learning; Competing in a Global Marketplace; and Making Alberta the Best Place to Live, Work and Visit.” There are so many elements of that 20-year strategic plan that are important, but making use of the resources that we have today and translating it into a knowledge economy for tomorrow and a society tomorrow which engenders respect, which looks into the issues that we need to deal with. Whether it’s medical research or science and engineering research or family violence and social sciences research, whether it’s championing the arts to make this the kind of place where we want to live, those are all very important.

So why then, Mr. Speaker, having said all that, will I not be supporting Bill 201? Well, I will not be supporting Bill 201 because one shouldn’t do indirectly what one can’t do directly. This is in effect a money bill. This is a bill which is suggesting how resources which come into the province of Alberta, into the government of Alberta coffers, should be allocated, and that would be a money bill. This is a bill to direct a bill. This bill doesn’t set up any of the funds. It suggests that a bill should be brought forward in the next session.

So the Leader of the Official Opposition actually steps outside the purpose of private members’ bills to say that this is a bill from our caucus. Well, it’s not a bill from caucus. It’s a private member’s bill, and it’s a bill being brought forward by a private member although the Leader of the Official Opposition, but it’s in essence a bill to create a bill. It’s a bill which would purport to tie the hands of the Legislature by directing it to bring in a bill and setting out some of the elements that should be in the bill. So I’m not sure what would happen if the bill that came in didn’t match the bill that was directing it to come in. It’s a very convoluted way to achieve public policy. It is a good way – and I commend the Leader of the Official

Opposition for finding this convoluted methodology – to raise some important public policy issues, which I hope we will be discussing in great detail after the tabling of the budget on April 19, very, very important issues about how we use the resources of Albertans that we obtain from the sale of our natural resources and how we use them to help build the future of this province. That’s a very, very important discussion and one which merits a broader discussion than what is provided for in the confines of a private member’s bill and particularly a private member’s bill with this limited a scope.

4:30

So with those remarks, Mr. Speaker, I’d say that I absolutely love the access to the future fund, wouldn’t want to necessarily change its name, but that would just be a private concern. It’s going to have a huge impact on the future of this province. I think we should be building it, and I hope we build it past the \$3 billion to a much larger fund.

The humanities, social sciences, and the arts concept. Not a new concept. I’ve discussed that with the new president of the University of Alberta, Indra Samarasekera. In fact, she mentioned it in her induction speech when she was sworn in as president of the University of Alberta. So that’s not an idea that’s new to the Official Opposition. It’s an idea which has been discussed and which, in my view, is a great idea.

The apportioning of funds. I think there should be a policy. I’ve heard the Minister of Finance indicate that we will be bringing forward a policy with respect to apportioning of funds, so that’s not a new idea.

The question of the humanities, social sciences, and the arts fund. Why you’d limit it to that amount I’m not sure. The fact of the matter is that this government has provided leadership over its time. It provided leadership in setting up the heritage medical research fund, which has proved to be extremely valuable. It has provided leadership in setting up the ingenuity fund, the cancer fund, the access to the future fund, and there’s so much more.

The Acting Speaker: The Official Opposition House Leader, followed by the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I’m really pleased to be able to get up in this Assembly and speak in support of Bill 201. I had a part in developing the policy which became this bill, and I am really delighted to see it come into this Legislative Assembly. I hope that we will get the support of government because as a number of them have mentioned, they really like what’s in this bill. I’m sure we can get them to support it because it’s such a good idea.

Mr. Speaker, as an Albertan I want to see the oil and gas, the nonrenewable natural resource revenue, in this province be an opportunity and continue to be an opportunity for all Albertans into eternity. I want to see that prosperity be perpetual. Whether we are talking about oil and gas revenues reducing because the resource itself is depleting or because there’s no demand for it, even in the government’s own figures they are anticipating and planning for that reduction in revenue. As it stands right now, that oil and gas is coming right out of the ground, and we’re spending it as fast as it comes. There is no savings plan in place.

That’s why I am so keen on the ideas that are embedded in this Bill 201. It does allow us to address that sustainability gap between how much other revenue we are raising and how much we are spending for every person in Alberta. That sustainability gap is the difference that we are basically subsidizing with nonrenewable resource revenue, and we need to stop doing that. We need to be

able to find a way to replace that money and make it perpetual as an opportunity for us.

I want to see that money go into an endowment fund for the infrastructure to address, and that's to address a lot of the problems that have been identified by the opposition for choices that the government has made. It certainly paid off a cash debt, but in doing so, it created an infrastructure debt, a human services debt, a long-term care debt, a homelessness debt. There have been a number of other ways that that cash debt was paid, and we're now seeing that come up in a number of these other debts and deficits.

Included in this Bill 201 is the idea of an infrastructure fund to pay back and to get our infrastructure up to speed, which is perfectly appropriate. We're a very wealthy province. We should have the best, and I want to see us have the best. Why wouldn't we have good roads and excellent bridges in good repair and long-term care centres that are bright and lively and offer dignity to those that live there? That's exactly the kind of thing that we should be doing.

I'm delighted to see the postsecondary education fund that is anticipated in our policy and in this bill. The Minister of Health and Wellness referred to the president of the University of Alberta's inaugural address, where she was talking about the possibilities for that university and how she'd like to see it placed in the top 20 universities in North America. You know, with a fund like this, that could happen, and that makes that possibility much more real to me, and I would really like to see that go ahead.

There's been quite a bit of talk on the other side about the access to the future fund. The problem with that is that it never got the funding that it was supposed to get, and it seems to be sort of languishing there. It's just not an active, viable, forward-moving fund. This one is. It continues to have money put into it, and it's uncapped, so we really could have all centres of excellence in our postsecondary institutions. We're not limiting that to our universities but also to our colleges, to our institutes of technology, even to apprenticeship programs, which are also a form of postsecondary learning opportunity. So very exciting in what we could do to educate our population, and that in itself becomes a non resource-based opportunity for the future.

When we talk about exploring other sources of revenue and other things that we could be doing in this province that aren't so directly reliant on oil and gas revenue, here's a way of creating that and of pouring into that knowledge-based economy that everyone says is now and is the future, so that's an excellent part of this.

The heritage fund, of course, is very important to all of us. It's an integral part of who we think of as ourselves, as Albertans, and I approve absolutely of the money going into that fund and the opportunities it creates for us. But, Mr. Speaker, it will be no surprise to you to learn that my favourite part of this proposal is the humanities, social sciences, and arts endowment fund. I was very proud of my colleagues for working on this idea and recognizing that there are certainly existing endowment funds and endowments of chairs at our various universities for maths and sciences and various other kinds of research and even, as the Minister of Health and Wellness indicated, the Alberta heritage fund for medical research, but we do not support specific endowments for social sciences, the humanities, and the arts.

It's very hard to get people to step up to the plate and underwrite or encourage philosophy or romance languages or social services and the various studies that go into that and, of course, the arts, the fine crafts and fine arts. They are an excellent opportunity for us in Alberta both to create a better quality of life for us but also as a very active participant in the economy. Money into the arts stays in Alberta. It doesn't leave and go home in the pockets of oil companies that go back to the States. Money into the arts stays in Alberta,

and all kinds of opportunities could be created through that fund.

For example, we have talked in the Alberta Liberals about our commitment to doubling the funding to the arts, and we're actually looking at the possibility and feasibility of tripling the funding to the arts. You look at the additional money that would be generated out of this fund every year, and we're looking at an additional \$28 million a year. So now you can really set your imagination on fire for the possibilities of things, like more public art.

4:40

I was in Saskatoon a year ago, and I was really interested to see that on almost every street corner in their downtown area they have public art. I look around Edmonton, Calgary, Medicine Hat, Lethbridge, Red Deer, Grande Prairie, Fort McMurray. I've been in all those cities in the last year. Almost none. I can't remember any public art with the exception of the Famous Five sculpture outside the special arts centre in Calgary and the EPCOR Centre for the Performing Arts in Calgary and a few here on the grounds of the Legislature.

Imagine if we had a sculpture park here at the Legislature. That kind of thing becomes possible when we look at an endowment fund that would include the arts. Although we have put a cap on it for now, I remain hopeful that we will be able to lift that cap at some point. In the meantime I think artists could also tap into the money that's available out of the opportunity fund, which of course is available for anybody with great ideas about how to make our province even better.

So I am very much in support of this. This has been a grassroots process that has come together from my caucus members being out in the public and looking at what people wanted. They wanted a plan. They wanted to know that there was going to be perpetual opportunity and, hopefully, prosperity that was coming from our nonrenewable resource revenues, and they wanted to see savings that would continue to pay off for us. I think we've satisfied all of that, and obviously we listened very carefully to the desire for support for postsecondary education, for infrastructure, for the heritage fund, for the arts and humanities, and that special fund, the opportunity fund, just to fire our imaginations.

It's interesting to me the way the government members have responded to this because none of them have been able to really find anything to criticize out of it, but they're very quick to try and take credit for what's in here or to try and pretend that it is modelled after one of their funds.

I look forward to everyone's support. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to contribute to second reading debate on Bill 201, the Funding Alberta's Future Act, sponsored by the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition. The intent of this legislation is commendable. Saving for Alberta's future is an integral part of ensuring that our province remains vibrant for many generations to come. Fortunately, we've always taken saving for the future seriously in Alberta. Mr. Speaker, we have the Alberta heritage savings trust fund, the access to the future fund, the sustainability fund, the Alberta heritage medical research fund, the Alberta cancer legacy fund, and numerous other endowments and funds. The value of these funds is tens of billions of dollars, dollars which can be used to improve the future of all Albertans.

Bill 201 seeks to build upon the government of Alberta's track record of saving prudently for our future. I support the intent of his

bill. We have another proud tradition in Alberta, a practice of consulting the public on issues of importance. Gathering the thoughts and perspectives of Albertans is important in order to formulate policy that is representative of their needs. This government believes that we must continue to engage Albertans. For example, the government has launched the Affordable Housing Task Force. This government is also committed to a safe communities and policing task force. These task forces will seek the opinions of all Albertans on issues of great importance to the future of the province before implementing solutions to these challenges.

In addition to this, the government of Alberta is carrying forward with the land-use framework. This initiative will be an opportunity for the government to consult with Albertans and develop strategies to manage Alberta's land base. While Bill 201 is consistent with this government's intent to plan for the future, I have reservations because I believe that it is not consistent with our practice of consulting with Albertans. The ingenuity of our people is our greatest resource. In order to maximize the potential of this resource, we must consult with Albertans regularly on issues of importance. Bill 201 contains no mechanisms for consulting with Albertans. Rather, it recommends that changes be implemented *carte blanche*.

This government is also committed to openness and transparency. That means inviting Albertans to participate in the democratic process. I believe that it is most productive to implement these changes publicly rather than through the closed processes called for by this bill. I don't believe that we can implement such sweeping legislation without first engaging in a full and thorough consultation process with Albertans, a process that is open and transparent. Therefore, I urge my hon. colleagues to defer support until such time as this process can be completed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, rise to speak in favour of Bill 201, the bill sponsored by the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition, Funding Alberta's Future Act.

Let me start by saying that this is not a surplus policy, Mr. Speaker. It is a revenue policy. The government side in the debate has highlighted the fact that they're now working on a surplus policy, and they're urging members of the opposition and members of the public to stay tuned because this policy is coming down and it should be great. What I'm saying is that we've already had our surplus policy more than 18 months ago, and now we have graduated and grown towards our own revenue policy to have a plan for this province, something that did not exist for at least the last 10 years. We are working on having a plan that incorporates surpluses, and it also incorporates revenues. So we're doing both things at the same time versus the government, who is now playing catch-up. They are now coming down with a surplus policy, and maybe two and a half years or three years from now they would have a revenue policy in place.

The second point I would like to make, Mr. Speaker, which was mentioned before, is that 40 of the hon. members in the government caucus backed Mr. Jim Dinning when he was seeking the Tory throne. Now, I am confident that they didn't all support him because he was just the front-runner in that race or he was the person with the most money or because he had the most volunteers on the ground. I'm hoping that the majority of them supported him because of his policies and because of where he stands on the issues, not simply because some of them were promised cabinet posts or

committee chairmanships. I hope some of them took the time to check his policies and see, for example, that he advocated putting 30 per cent of the nonrenewable resource revenue into a savings account for the future in regular years and 50 per cent in boom years.

Also, Mr. Peter Lougheed, who basically established the Tory dynasty, was on the record advocating and supporting something similar to what we're proposing here, basically putting 30 per cent of all oil and gas revenues, including our share of oil sands net profits, into the fund, into a savings account.

Again, these are two supposedly respected individuals, one who slayed the deficit, who was Treasurer when the on-paper debt was eliminated, and then the other person, who established the Tory dynasty, both of them speaking in favour of our idea: 30 per cent of nonrenewable resources going into a savings account for the future. So my challenge to those 40 people across is: if you believed in Jim's fiscal policies and if you like where he stood on that particular issue, then I urge you to speak.

It is really surprising that so far, Mr. Speaker, only three of the government MLAs signalled their desire to participate in this debate. Isn't securing Alberta's future a priority for all of us? Are those members not concerned about the future and what legacy we leave to our kids and their kids? Are most of them only concerned about their re-election chances? Is talk about resource policies and talk about savings for the future only sexy and attractive during election campaigns, when we need to engage and stimulate and impress citizens of this province, but once they're here under the dome, then it's no longer sexy or attractive? Should the province continue on its course to certain destruction? Should we as legislators allow this government to continue with its addiction to nonrenewable energy resources? Should we allow this government to keep throwing money at problems, to use band-aids and analgesics, to run our affairs like there's no tomorrow? Should we let them do that? Where is the plan? Where is the long-term, sustainable vision?

The hon. Government House Leader and minister of health started his debate by complaining about how the Leader of the Opposition ignored mentioning this minister's Tory leadership campaign and the promises it contained. My question, after having listened to his remarks, is simply this. Are these topics only of interest and of importance because certain members of the government caucus were seeking the leadership, were hoping to become Premier? Where does he stand on the issue now versus three months ago? Does he not think that we need to invest in Alberta's future?

4:50

The other thing is that Bill 201 is not convoluted, as the hon. minister indicated, and even if it were, Mr. Speaker, I am sure that he has enough staff in his department and enough staff in the Minister of Finance's department to explain it line by line to him and show him the merit and show him the great potential that we are throwing away here. We can also give him a briefing on this. If he was sincere and if the Premier was sincere in signalling that the Premier and his cabinet are open to listening to the opposition and working with the opposition for the benefit of all Albertans, here is their chance. We can actually tell him why we think this bill is useful and why we think this is something that is overdue, but it's not done yet. We can actually salvage some of this prosperity and put it to good use for our kids and their kids.

Now, I'm also reminded that the hon. government whip is switched off during private members' business. The hon. House leader was talking about the definition of private member's bill, and he was challenging the Leader of the Opposition, you know, as to why all members of his caucus are supportive of his idea. The answer is: we are supportive because it makes sense. In making this

remark, I am also comparing ourselves to members of the government caucus. I said that only three of them participated in the debate, and I am really not sure if more of them will be participating later.

Members of the caucus opposite have indicated to me on several occasions that during private members' business their whip is switched off, that they treat private members' business as a free vote. So when I basically questioned why they always seem to vote the same way and they always seem to vote against private members' business originating from the opposition, one jokingly told me that they all think alike. Another time the hon. Minister of Justice jokingly mentioned that they do it to protect us from ourselves, and that's basically the attitude that we have to put an end to, Mr. Speaker. This is the attitude that nothing good could come from the opposition side and that the government knows it all and the puck stops there. They basically know it all, and there's no use for the opposition.

My challenge to them is: if certainly the whip is not on, then maybe more of them should be speaking. The whip is on to prevent them from speaking or to make sure that they speak in a certain way, that they all agree. So I think that they should really not allow ideology to stand in the way of good debate, and I think that if they're true to their promise that they're going to listen to the opposition and work with the opposition, as signalled by the Premier, then I think they should allow this bill to move on to the next stage of debate, which is the Committee of the Whole, to now be able to give it the attention that it deserves and to go through it line by line and see where things could be improved, where things could be made better. I think that is the role of private members' business, and we should really emphasize it.

There's also a saying, Mr. Speaker, that tomorrow, today will be yesterday. I don't want as an individual and as a legislator, as a member of this esteemed House, to leave tomorrow to be too late, to be yesterday, a distant yesterday, where our children are going to question us and say: why did you fritter it away, and where is the money?

Everyone in this House should really vote for Bill 201 in second reading, and then if the government side remains silent for the most part, like I mentioned, or if they speak to just blindly oppose it, then I'd be reminded of another saying which I ran across the other day, and it says: a zebra cannot change its stripes. If the Premier was sincere in his pledge to listen to us and work with us, then I urge hon. members of his caucus to do the same.

If we have time, I would maybe go through some of the math that's incorporated into this just to prove to the hon. Government House Leader that it is not convoluted or hard to understand. In 1992-93 and comparing it to 2005-2006, this interval here, the population has risen slightly, by more than 25 per cent, from 2.66 million to 3.33 million. Per capita revenues and per capita spending for that same period, '92-93 to '05-06, were basically \$4,542 and \$6,611. That was at the beginning of this interval, and that's the year the hon. former Premier took over. In 2005-2006 the per capita revenues and spending went up to \$6,361 and \$8,500.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Rodney: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure to rise to speak to Bill 201, Funding Alberta's Future Act. I know that I've had my name in to speak for a little while, and I think there may be one or two government members who are yet to come. I salute the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung. I have a

lot of respect for him, but perhaps being patient would reveal that there are others on both sides of this House who are very anxious to speak to this bill.

That indeed is part of the theme of my remarks here today. The act does propose to create a funding Alberta's future account of the general revenue fund, and 30 per cent of the nonrenewable resource revenues will be directed into the account. Funds from the account would be distributed as follows: 35 per cent to Alberta heritage trust fund, 35 per cent to a new postsecondary endowment fund to replace the access to the future fund, 25 per cent directed to the capital account, and 5 per cent to a humanities, social sciences, and arts endowment. Once the fund reaches half a billion dollars, funds will be allocated to an opportunity fund, and its purpose will be developed in consultation with Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, this indeed is very laudable as Bill 201 does lay out one manner of managing Alberta's prosperity. While building up endowments can sustain spending over the long term, it's worth noting that Bill 201 is not the way I think our prosperity should be managed.

Governing is about setting priorities and getting results. The hon. Premier has set priorities, and we're working on delivering results; for example, governing with integrity and transparency, which includes finding more efficient ways of delivering government services to Albertans; number two, managing growth pressures, which includes controlling spending and getting the best value for tax dollars, setting out a long-term capital plan, investing \$400 million to address the issues related to the growth in Fort McMurray region; number three, improving quality of life, including making postsecondary education more accessible and a community spirit fund, which will match charitable donations; number four, providing safe and secure communities; and number five, building a stronger Alberta, which includes long-term funding commitment to municipalities of \$1.4 billion, upgrading our resources to sustain economic growth, supporting nanotechnology, which has the potential to transform the world as we know it.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's clear. The government's plan is a clear plan, and it will benefit every Albertan. It will preserve our current prosperity, and it will allow for greater prosperity for our children and our grandchildren generations beyond. Perhaps the hon. member is just a little impatient. This is only the third day of the legislative session, and a budget will be tabled on April 19, laying out the fiscal plan for 2007-2008. The hon. Leader of the Opposition has presented his plan, and I've spoken about the government's plan.

It's very clear. The government plan addresses the issues that Albertans would like to see addressed. The Minister of Finance was mandated to consult with Albertans on Budget 2007 and table it. He was also mandated to lead a financial investment and planning commission, and I'm confident that these objectives will indeed be met. We have a strong starting point to move forward from. The government has a strong fiscal position, and Bill 201 is simply not required because the Alberta government will have close to \$45 billion in net assets as of March 31, 2007, and in all sincerity this is a position that no other jurisdiction is currently in. Our capital plan commits over \$13 billion over the next three years to build roads, schools, and hospitals.

5:00

An Hon. Member: How much?

Mr. Rodney: That's \$13 billion. Thanks for asking.

The access to the future fund is transforming our postsecondary system and is encouraging innovation.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that everyone in the House and everyone in this province would agree that we have a great situation, and I

think many beyond our borders are very glad for us or envious, depending on what part of the spectrum they're on. I think it's very clear that it's the opposite of government complacency. It's a government that is acting with a plan. Government has been prudent with its resource revenue, endowments have been established, and infrastructure has been built.

For these reasons I cannot support Bill 201. Thank you very much.

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

Mr. Bonko: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my privilege to be able to speak to Bill 201, Funding Alberta's Future Act. The Alberta Liberals are thinking about the future, something we were accused of last session by the Member for Athabasca-Redwater, something which Albertans have been waiting for for a long time, and I quote: only the Liberals would think about something that might happen in the future. In 2004 the Alberta Liberals campaigned on a surplus policy where all surpluses would be allocated, 35 per cent into the heritage fund, a fund which was envisioned by a great Albertan at one point, great visionaries who looked to the future of Alberta, something that Alberta has been lacking for some time until now.

Getting back to where the surplus would be directed: 35 per cent to a postsecondary endowment fund to ensure that we hope to have and should have a well-educated population today and tomorrow. With the increase in the amount it costs a student today, it's no wonder this government is trying to give newborns a head start with their \$500 for every baby born. We recognize that because we've been meeting with postsecondary students for the last little while. When they're coming out after graduation with bills in excess of \$160,000, where are they going to be able to start? Where is their future when they're paying off . . . [interjection] Yeah. Exactly. Where is the advantage?

They're going to need a big, bold plan from this government. Thus the 35 per cent will be welcomed to offset the climbing costs for students in the future.

The Alberta Liberals will save 25 per cent into capital investment, eliminating Alberta's infrastructure, which continues to grow beyond most municipalities' capabilities. It's evident when you drive down the roads; they're getting poorer and poorer. I'm not just referring to Fort McMurray, which recently received \$400 million, a save-the-MLA fund, but it was needed infrastructure. In Edmonton and Calgary we need that money just as well. The NDs will have to take our word for it because they're just going to be able to park their cars soon.

The last of the 5 per cent will go to the Alberta arts endowment fund, which would support the humanities, social sciences, and arts, which would cap at \$500 million. Instead of the artists going cap in hand, they'd be able to make a living. I would mention that the 5 per cent does not include horse racing. Some consider this to be an art in motion. I would disagree. This would be for real artists here in Alberta. All Albertans would benefit from this bill, something we could brag about, something we haven't been able to brag about for a long time.

We talk about advantage, and we talk about consultation. Let's talk about the cheques. There was no consultation there. It was at a whim. Albertans got \$1.2 million and absolutely nothing to show for it. There was no consultation there. There was no consultation in the trade, investment, and labour agreement known as TILMA. No consultation there either. So when we talk about consultation, let's remember what we did in the past here.

Bill 201 is offering that in 13 years we could be giving Albertans an advantage, something they're lacking today. That must be why

we no longer hear the catchphrase, the Alberta advantage. It isn't there. It doesn't exist anymore. You just have to go out and look for it; it isn't there. Homelessness continues to grow. Affordable housing is lacking; people can't pay the rent. That's the advantage. It's hard to say that when it isn't the case.

This bill would be welcomed by Albertans because it's a real plan for real issues that matter. Mr. Speaker, we the Alberta Liberals have been doing a lot of consultation around the province, and people have said that at the end of the day there needs to be a plan. There needs to be long-term sustainability in funding as well as where we're spending our monies. This plan does address this.

So I'm going to sit down, and I'm going to hear the rest of the input that other members may have. I know the time is getting near, and I do want to hear some obvious support from the other side because this is a plan that benefits all Albertans. It doesn't matter what side it came from. This is the issue. It came from a nonpartisan person here. We want to make sure that we respect and promote all views from all Albertans, and this would certainly capture that.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any others who want to participate in the debate?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview to close debate.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I do appreciate those who spoke today and participated in the debate: the Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, and the Member for Calgary-Lougheed, as well as so many members of the Alberta Liberal caucus. I guess the leader of the New Democrat caucus spoke as well.

The importance of this bill I don't think can be overstated, and there were variations on a theme in some of the comments that came up, even from the government side, including those of the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud. A number of concerns were raised. Certainly, if this bill passes through second reading into Committee of the Whole, we would be prepared to entertain and discuss amendments. We're always open to that. As we made clear, we don't have a monopoly on good ideas here, so we're prepared to discuss amendments. Perhaps there needs to be consultation. I might point out, however, that consultation isn't always the way of this government either, and the approach to TILMA is one recent example of that.

The process of a private member's bill, for those on the government side who aren't aware of it, precludes us from doing anything more direct than we do in this piece of legislation. So the comments from the Government House Leader on why this is a convoluted process are uninformed on that particular account. We had to do what we had to do to get the bill to the floor, and our hands are tied. Nonetheless, it's clear to everybody who reads the bill what the intention of the bill is and what the achievements of the bill would be.

So I urge all members of the Assembly to support this bill. It's the kind of bill that will free Alberta's public services from the roller-coaster ride of a resource-based economy. It will put us on a sustainable fiscal foundation for the future. It will establish a postsecondary endowment fund that will allow Alberta's technical schools and colleges and universities to reach heights unachieved in the history of this province and, indeed, in the history of this country. It will allow us systematically to deal with the infrastructure debt. It will allow an endowment fund for the humanities, social sciences, and arts to take its place alongside engineering and medicine and the sciences.

So, Mr. Speaker, I commend this – I commend this – to the people of this Assembly. It represents hard work. It represents a great deal of research. It represents support and analysis from acclaimed economists as well as acclaimed business leaders, who think the work that's done in this is solid, farsighted, and visionary. So I turn to each and every one of you in this Assembly, some of you who support these notions in principle and, indeed, have supported them in detail, and I ask you, when the time comes, to stand in favour of this legislation.

Thank you.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for second reading lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:09 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

For the motion:

Blakeman	Elsalhy	Taft
Bonko	Miller, R.	Taylor
Chase	Swann	

5:20

Against the motion:

Ady	Graydon	Mitzel
Brown	Groeneveld	Morton
Cao	Haley	Oberle
Cardinal	Hancock	Prins
Danyluk	Herard	Renner
Doerksen	Hinman	Rodney
Ducharme	Horner	Rogers
Eggen	Jablonski	Strang
Evans	Liepert	VanderBurg
Fritz	Melchin	Zwozdesky

Totals:	For – 8	Against – 30
---------	---------	--------------

[Motion for second reading of Bill 201 lost]

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

Mr. Renner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to move that given the hour, we call it 5:30 and adjourn until 8 this evening.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:22 p.m.]