

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

**Title:** Wednesday, March 14, 2007

**1:00 p.m.**

Date: 07/03/14

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

**The Speaker:** Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Author of all wisdom, knowledge, and understanding, we ask for guidance in order that truth and justice may prevail in all of our judgments. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

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

**Mr. Knight:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is again a pleasure for me to rise this afternoon to introduce to you and through you to all of my colleagues in the House 13 special guests from the Department of Energy that have joined us today in the members' gallery. We have Sylvia Presiznuik, Gail Marusyn, Deborah Boelstler, Yolanda Hutchings, Yasmin Suleman, Donna McLachlan, Beth Holmes, Danielle Haverstock, Olena Urban, Julia Hai, Brent Fuhr, Ryan Borador, Raelyn Huseby. I would ask them all to stand, please, to receive the warm welcome of my colleagues.

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

**Dr. Oberg:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour and privilege to introduce to you and through you to the Members of the Legislative Assembly 12 members of the Finance department. We talk very much about our public service and the great jobs they do, but quite simply if it wasn't for people in the tax and revenue administration, the investment management division, the strategic and business services, we wouldn't be able to carry on our work. So I'd ask Anne Bethell, Bonnie Toh, Dustin Gumpinger, Elaine Siu, Ivy Wong, James Ackroyd, Jeff Urbanowski, Jerry Brige, Jim Daye, Jonathan Herman, Trevor Bilan, and Wilfred Chan to all stand and receive the very warm welcome and appreciation of the Legislative Assembly.

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

**Mr. Prins:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour again to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of students and their adult leaders from the Clive school. They're grade 6 students. There are 16 of them. They are accompanied by teachers Mrs. Marla Kolybaba and Miss Kelly Janisse. Parent helpers are Mr. Garth Rowley, Mr. Howard Hopkins, Naomi Bennett, and Mrs. Deniese Lyons. Now, this group has always been accompanied by a teacher by the name of Bob MacKinnon. He was not able to be here this year – he's been here 17 years in a row – due to some health issues in his family. So he hopes to be back next year. I would ask my students and parents to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

**Mr. Flaherty:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly 74 students from Leo Nickerson school in St. Albert and teachers Ms Desjardins, Mme Scharf, Mr. Paul Annicchiarico, Mrs. Wawrychuk, Mrs.

Hussey, and Mrs. Morgan and parent Mrs. Van Hoeve. I wish them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour and privilege to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all hon. Members of this Legislative Assembly a fine gentleman from Mexico. Mr. Armando Garcia is visiting the Legislative Assembly this afternoon. He is married with two small children. He is a graduate of the University of Guadalajara, specializing in veterinary medicine. He tells me that he had an excellent academic record there, and he has the documents to prove it. He is in Canada as a temporary foreign worker; his visa expires in November of 2007. He was limited and restricted in his work, but he was working on a corporate farm out east of Provost. He was on the farm that is named on the visa, and it is named C.G. Paulgaard Farms Ltd. I would now ask Mr. Garcia to please rise. I don't know which gallery he's in, but if he would rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise today to introduce the driving forces behind one of the most exciting community projects occurring in Alberta. Christy Cholak-Morin is the executive director of Arts on the Avenue as well as a director, producer, drama coach, and artist in residence with Edmonton public schools. Michelle Hayduk is a resident commercial design expert who spends much of her time volunteering with the local community grassroots organization known as Arts on the Avenue. Scott Peters is best known as a founding member of the local Celtic band Captain Tractor and has also worked in the theatre arts community with nearly every professional theatre group in the city over the past 20 years. With him is his four-year-old son, Thorin Freeman-Peters.

These three individuals are together working towards restoring and redeveloping the Alberta Avenue area. They brought about many fantastic things: the Arts Alive! fall festival, assistance for community theatre, and with the help of my constituency office the upcoming Workers Art Show as part of the May Week celebrations. They are seated in the public gallery, Mr. Speaker, and I would now ask that they rise and receive the warm, traditional welcome of this Assembly.

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

**Mr. Eggen:** Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly Vesna Kovacic. Vesna is currently a social work student at Grant MacEwan College and is completing her practicum in my constituency office from September of 2006. Vesna's family has been in Alberta since moving from Saskatchewan in 1979. Vesna herself moved back to Alberta to be closer to her family and to pursue a lifelong passion of becoming a social worker. Vesna has been a very valuable part of our team in the constituency of Edmonton-Calder, and we are grateful for all of her hard work. I would ask her now, please, to rise and to receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

**Dr. Pannu:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased today to introduce to you and through you to this House Denise Ogonoski. Denise is a lifetime Edmontonian who started this past January as a constituency assistant in our Edmonton-Strathcona constituency office. Currently Denise is completing her political science degree at the University of Alberta. She was a media delegate at the World Social Forum in Venezuela last year and volunteered for the People's Pedal bicycle co-op.

Mr. Speaker, you and other members of the House are invited to come and visit my constituency and McIntyre park, where this co-op usually has a stall of bicycles which are available for us to use, and that would mean that we control the emissions that go into the atmosphere and create problems for us.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of my constituents I would like to thank Denise for the service she is already providing to the constituents of Edmonton-Strathcona. We all look forward to seeing her continue her excellent work. Denise is seated in public gallery, and now I'll ask her to please stand to receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

**Mr. Boutilier:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta has a long history of strong ethnic and cultural ties with the Ukraine. Nearly 10 per cent of Albertans have Ukrainian ancestry. Just to name a few in this Assembly we have Danyluk, and we have Zwozdesky and Cenaiko, and we also have Premier Stelmach. Joining us today in your gallery is the ambassador of the Ukraine, His Excellency Mr. Ostash, and his lovely wife, Mrs. Hrymych, and their young son Danylo. The ambassador met with the Premier and other ministers and had a state dinner today at Government House. I'd like to ask them all to rise at this point. [Remarks in Ukrainian]

1:10

**The Speaker:** His Excellency is also a 12-year veteran of the Ukrainian Parliament.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

**Mr. R. Miller:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great honour to have the opportunity today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Danielle Smith. Danielle is the director of provincial affairs for the Canadian Federation of Independent Business here in Alberta, an organization which many of you will know represents 9,200 businesses in Alberta. She was here today, Mr. Speaker, lobbying members of the Official Opposition and presenting the CFIB's prebudget presentation to the Official Opposition caucus. In the spirit of openness and accountability and in an effort to pre-empt Bill 1, Danielle has asked if the Canadian Federation of Independent Business might be the first organization to register as a lobbyist. They would be proud to do so. I would ask Danielle to please rise – she's in the public gallery – and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: **Members' Statements**

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, we've been on TV since 1 o'clock contrary to what the chair said yesterday.

The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

### Canadian Agricultural Safety Week

**Mr. Prins:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to remind all Albertans, especially our farming community, which

includes the grade 6 class from the Clive school, that starting today and running until March 20 is Canadian Agricultural Safety Week. Farm safety is a crucial part of agriculture in this province and an important part of keeping all rural Albertans safe. This year's theme, Protect Your Moving Parts, focuses on the importance of using caution when working around farm machinery. It also encourages farmers to use proper guarding and shielding to prevent accidents from occurring.

Mr. Speaker, according to the Canadian agricultural injury surveillance program, farm machinery accidents, which include being entangled, pinned, or struck by machinery, were the leading cause of hospitalized injuries on Canadian farms from 1990-2000. In Alberta there are an average of 18 farm-related deaths per year. Seventy per cent of the incidents involved farm machinery, and sadly, like most fatalities on farms, these deaths were preventable.

Education and information are the most powerful ways to impact behaviour, and I would like to applaud the organizers and sponsors of this year's Alberta Farm Safety Week for their hard work and dedication to keeping Alberta farms safe places to work and grow.

I am pleased that our government is a partner in the launch of a new ad campaign aimed at youth and new farm workers. Youth make up a significant portion of new farm workers, and farm safety education and awareness for this group is a particular focus of this government. I'm proud to be a part of a government that cares about helping our young people and new farm workers.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to recognize Canadian Agricultural Safety Week from March 14 to March 20.

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

### Per Capita Federal Funding

**Mr. Cao:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Canada Statistics just released a census document titled Portrait of the Canadian Population in 2006. A subtitle is Alberta: The Engine of Population Growth. The Canada census has just proven what we have witnessed for years. Between 2001 and '06 Canada's population growth was the highest in the G-8 countries. Three-quarters of Canadian population growth is thanks to the joining of people from many parts of the world. Canada's population growth between 2001 and '06 was higher than the previous intercensal period.

Mr. Speaker, I want to commend our Premier in setting management of growth as one of the government's five top priorities. There is tremendous growth pressure experienced in Alberta in general and in our constituencies in Calgary in particular. Alberta's population has now reached 3.3 million. Its population growth of 10.6 per cent is the highest in the country, twice the national average. If the province continues to grow at least 10 per cent every five years, then our population would double between 2006 and mid-2030. So Alberta now has topped 10 per cent of our national population for the first time.

Myself and the majority of my constituents believe that sharing the federal financial allocation should be based on per capita. If every Canadian taxpayer follows the same national rule, every Canadian should be treated equitably. It doesn't matter where he or she lives. Alberta should receive federal funding on a fair per capita principle. Realizing that growth pressure and needs are everywhere, I would suggest that our provincial government persuade our federal government to apply the fair per capita funding principle to Alberta and that within Alberta the per capita funding principles should be considered as well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

#### Canada Safeway Charitable Donations

**Mr. Agnihotri:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For a number of years now Canada Safeway has supported local area charities through their Because We Care campaign. Each year individual Safeway stores adopt a charity and conduct a number of fundraising events in their store to raise funds for their local community groups.

The Mill Woods Town Centre Safeway store has partnered with Edmonton Meals on Wheels, that is a not-for-profit organization that relies on volunteers to provide a nutritious meal program which promotes health and wellness and independence for their clients. Mr. Speaker, on Saturday, March 10, I joined a number of Meals on Wheels volunteers and Safeway staff in helping promote this event. Since selecting Meals on Wheels as their charity in 2005, the Mill Woods Safeway has raised more than \$25,000 for this worthwhile cause.

Since 1998 customers and employees of Canada Safeway have raised more than \$9.7 million to help over 1,400 charities in Canada. I ask my fellow Members of the Alberta Legislative Assembly to join me in saluting this outstanding commitment to our local communities.

Thank you.

#### Vauxhall Academy of Baseball

**Mr. McFarland:** I attended the Vauxhall baseball academy as it held its first banquet and fundraiser this past Saturday, Mr. Speaker. This is an exciting concept: the first high school baseball academy in Canada, that is putting small-town, rural Alberta on the national map.

In its first school year the Vauxhall baseball academy has attracted 21 student players from Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick. Young men in grades 10, 11, and 12 have joined the Vauxhall Jets team from Calgary, Chinook, Hays, Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, Strathmore, Rocky Mountain House, Round Hill, Taber, and Vauxhall in Alberta as well as from Imperial in Saskatchewan, Kentville in Nova Scotia, Sussex Corner in New Brunswick, and Winnipeg, Manitoba.

This year's award recipients included one player who maintains a 95 per cent average. The goals that these players have targeted include a career in dentistry, two in pre-med, three in engineering, and one has been accepted into the aerospace program in Alabama.

The Jets' stadium, their home diamond, is one of the finest outdoor facilities in rural Canada and one of only eight lighted stadiums in all of Alberta. Vauxhall high school is a smaller 2A high school that faced the prospect of not having a basketball team this year. In a great show of support nine of the baseball Jets players stepped forward to help fill the basketball team roster for their school. On Saturday, hours before their awards banquet, the Vauxhall basketball team, competing up at the 3A level, won the zone finals. They outscored their opposition in the final game by 50 points, earning a berth this weekend in the provincial 3A basketball finals in Rocky Mountain House, Alberta.

Their principal, Todd Ojala, commended the boys on their accomplishment not only for their three hour per day basketball workout but also for all their accomplishments. They are billeted with families in the community. I want to compliment the coaches, Les McTavish and assistant coach Jim Kotkas, and all the teaching staff of Vauxhall for a very supportive program.

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

1:20

#### Warner Girls Hockey School

**Mr. Hinman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Some things are so good and so important and so exciting that they're worth repeating, and I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat for alerting this Assembly to the hockey jewel of the province, the Warner Hockey School for Girls.

What an outstanding opportunity for young women to develop and pursue their dream of hockey. This is a classic Alberta heritage story of blazing a new path, a story of not just surviving but thriving and rising to the top where skeptics said that it couldn't be done. It all started with a question – how do we keep our high school open? – and then a dream that evolved into a hockey school for girls, followed by an unbelievable amount of hard work, sacrifice, dedication of the volunteers in both hours and donations. This is truly hockey at its best.

They have attracted young women from across Canada, the U.S., and Sweden. In just four short years the graduates from this school have received over \$3 million in scholarships and bursaries from recruiting institutions. They play in the Alberta Major Midget Female Hockey League and have won the league the last three years. They just got back from a trip to the Maritimes, where they played against the St. Thomas University team, winning a decisive 10-2 victory. The next day they played Dalhousie University, winning 3-2. They then went on to play Team Nova Scotia, where they allowed two of their top players to play for their home team. They won 7-5. A day's rest and then they played Team P.E.I. and won 3-0 and the next night 4-1.

They have now won the hearts of many Canadians on CBC's Kraft Hockeyville competition. Go to the [cbc.ca/hockeyville](http://cbc.ca/hockeyville) website, watch the three-minute video, and then vote for Warner. Watch the other videos, and then vote for Warner again. Vote often, and support Alberta's hockey school. Warner has a population of 379; Cornwall, 55,000; North Bay, 53,000. Warner not only deserves our support; they need it. Let's make Hockeyville Albertaville.

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

#### U of A Pandas Volleyball Team

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I'm sure everybody here knows, my constituency is the proud home of the University of Alberta, and it's a great honour and privilege today to recognize the U of A Pandas volleyball team.

The number one ranked Pandas captured their seventh CIS crown with a 3-1 defeat of the defending national champions, the Laval Rouge et Or. Led by CIS player of the year and tournament MVP Tiffany Dodds, the Pandas produced a great team effort. Dodds finished the game with 17 kills, putting away the game point. Rookie Samantha Wojtkiw and Alexa Berton recorded a combined 10 blocks while Jocelyn Blair had 12 kills. Wojtkiw finished with 12 kills, three aces, and an 87 per cent hitting percentage. Jocelyn Blair and Daryl Roper were named tournament all-stars.

Special recognition should also go to their head coach, Laurie Eisler, a three-time CIS coach of the year, a Panda coach since 1991. These hard-working and dedicated young women deserve tremendous respect and admiration for their accomplishments and for bringing yet another CIS banner home to the U of A. Congratulations to the Pandas.

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#### Presenting Petitions

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

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I present a petition from a number of signatories in Alberta, undersigned residents petitioning the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to consider providing additional funds for the Calgary health region to “proceed immediately and as originally planned with the construction of a hospital in south Calgary.”

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

**Mr. Backs:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am presenting quite a number of tablings with the right number of copies for a petition supporting Gary Hunt in his efforts.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

**Mr. Coutts:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today on behalf of the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul to table a letter and a petition from 193 Albertans from the Buffalo Lake Métis settlement and the surrounding area asking the government to introduce legislation to enforce mandatory use of helmets when operating a quad, trike, or any ATV, enforce an age limit for the operation of ATVs, and for smaller ATVs to have manufacturers put governing mechanisms on because children are operating them.

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

**Mr. Elsalhy:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’m presenting a petition signed by 64 citizens in Edmonton urging the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to complete as soon as possible the overpasses and interchanges at the locations where Anthony Henday Drive, the Edmonton ring road, intersects Lessard Road, Callingwood Road, and Cameron Heights Road.  
Thank you.

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### Notices of Motions

**Mr. Renner:** I beg, maybe, some advice from the Speaker on the new process. The government wishes to advise the House that written questions and motions for returns stand and retain their places. Do I give notice of that motion now, or do I simply make that statement?

**The Speaker:** Notice.

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### Introduction of Bills

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Public Security and Solicitor General.

#### Bill 16 Police Amendment Act, 2007

**Mr. Lindsay:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 16, the Police Amendment Act, 2007.

These amendments to the Police Act will allow the establishment of a provincial body to investigate police when someone has been seriously injured or dies as a result of the direct actions of a police officer. This team would also investigate highly sensitive or serious matters involving police. The proposed amendments will also give the province the option of taking over lock-up facilities from municipal police agencies. Alberta corrections officers or Alberta sheriffs could be used for these operations.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 16 read a first time]

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

#### Bill 17

#### Limitation Statutes Amendment Act, 2007

**Dr. Brown:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 17, the Limitation Statutes Amendment Act, 2007.

[Motion carried; Bill 17 read a first time]

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

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 17 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

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

#### Bill 18

#### Judicature Amendment Act, 2007

**Mr. Stevens:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being the Judicature Amendment Act, 2007.

This act amends the Judicature Act to empower Alberta’s courts to deal more effectively with vexatious litigants. The Judicature Act deals with the jurisdiction powers of the Court of Queen’s Bench and the Court of Appeal. It also deals with the administration of justice in the province, including some matters of the provincial court. The proposed amendments to this act will remove the requirement to obtain the Attorney General’s consent to make an application to have a person declared a vexatious litigant. Amendments to this act will give all three courts the jurisdiction to hear vexatious litigant applications.

[Motion carried; Bill 18 read a first time]

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### Statement by the Speaker

#### Oral Question Period

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, we’ll come back to introductions. But before we commence Oral Question Period today, in what is the second day of the operation of the “rules,” the chair would like to make a comment. As the chair indicated yesterday, there was nothing in the Standing Orders revisions adopted last Monday night concerning the operation of Oral Question Period. Section 3(a)(ii) of the House leaders’ agreement states that questions and answers shall be 45 seconds, which is the general rule that the chair has been applying since the start of the 26th Legislature in March of 2005. There was no mention in the House leaders’ agreement about preambles to questions or deviating from the accepted practice of limiting preambles to supplementary questions.

1:30

However, the chair has had an opportunity now to meet with all three House leaders this morning. This is the first time that we have met during the process leading to the House leaders’ agreement. This was a very positive step in communicating about the intention and expectations of the House leaders about the March 7 agreement. If you’ve ever seen the movie *Lost in Translation*, about the guy who goes to Tokyo, just think of that as I go through the rest of this.

After that meeting the chair will be vigorously enforcing the 45-second rule from the time the member is recognized until the end of the 45 seconds. This will apply to questions, and this will apply to

answers. It may involve stopwatches. This is how it will work in practice. When the chair rises and says, "The Leader of the Official Opposition," when that "n" is heard by one of the table officers, a click will go on in a watch. The chair will administer the House as normal, and within five seconds the chair will notice that there are five seconds left, and then bang; you know, like they do in football, baseball, and everything else. It won't be this. It'll be that. Okay?

Second thing. During the 45-second period – and this will apply to questions rather than answers – preambles will be allowed, whether main or supplementary questions. It seems to be the overwhelming desire of the members. So you've got 45 seconds for the question. In the past it was a pretty vigorous interpretation: no preambles in the second or third question. Now permitted.

The chair also wants to make it very clear that when that clock starts counting on the "n," if the hon. members stand up and cheer the hon. member for 30 seconds, the clock has been running. That means there are only 15 seconds left for the remainder of the question. Now, I know my hon. colleagues – I've been here for a number of years – so I know what the potential is of happening. Okay?

The chair wants to make one thing very clear. He has no difficulty whatsoever enforcing this provision. The chair would point out that Standing Order 13(1), which has not changed, requires the Speaker to preserve order and decorum. In the chair's experience what often causes question period to become unruly are inflammatory preambles that have little to do with the question that is to be asked. So while the chair will allow the greatest latitude to members in their questions and answers, the chair will not let question period deteriorate into a situation that would serve to bring this institution into disrepute and in the process reflect poorly on all members, especially other members who are not involved in the shenanigans.

If there are concerns about the operation of question period, the chair would encourage members to bring those concerns to his or her House leader. This interpretation was arrived at about 11:30 this morning, so some members may not be aware of it, but the deal was that the House leaders are to bring this updated version of the rule to all of his or her members.

Remember as well that we have another opportunity for members to convey their thoughts, and that is to the chair of the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek, as this committee is to have a role in reviewing the operation of the rule changes.

Please do not send notes to the chair, as happened yesterday. The chair wants to be very clear that he is committed to ensuring that the operation of the Assembly represents the expectation of members. It is your Assembly, and the chair has been elected to enforce your rules.

To the two independent members in the House, I'd invite them to come and visit me at 4:30 this afternoon because in addition to this clarification, the chair also provided to the three House leaders a list of questions and comments with respect to the proposed changes to the rules of the Assembly and also provided to the three House leaders, as best as one can determine, an anticipated budget to implement all of these changes and these rules. The three House leaders will provide that information to their caucus members. I will provide that to the two members in the Assembly who were not present at the meeting this morning and, if required, will table those documents in the House at a subsequent date, but I do not anticipate that this will be required.

So, Micheline, are we ready?

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## Oral Question Period

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

### Red Deer River Water Transfer

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As is often said in this Assembly, whiskey is for drinking, and water is for fighting over. The people of the Red Deer River Valley are ready to fight over the transfer of water from their river to a shopping mall on the edge of Calgary. To the Premier: how can the Premier claim that this government is supporting a fair process on the Balzac water transfer licence application when various ministers have publicly supported and applauded this project and the government itself voted \$4.8 million to help pay for it?

**Mr. Stelmach:** The process in terms of reviewing water licences has been in place for many years in this province, and in fact, Mr. Speaker, it might have been implemented way back when you were a Minister of Environment, so it's got a lot of history to it. It's proven that it's fair to both sides, and we will follow the process that has been established.

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

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is another issue on which this government is so divided. Not long after various ministers applauded the project and approved the money, this Premier hit the campaign trail and called the project ridiculous. I'll table a document demonstrating that. Why did this Premier call the project ridiculous when his own government was supporting it?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, I'll wait to review the so-called documents that the Leader of the Opposition has, but I have to reiterate: there is a process in place. There's a quasi-judicial authority that's put in place to evaluate the information coming on both sides for this water application or any other water application that there is in the province of Alberta.

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

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Premier called the project ridiculous and said that he would investigate it, can the Premier explain now why he has flip-flopped on this project?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, the hon. leader has to be very careful in the kind of words he uses. I am now the Premier of the province of Alberta, and I would not be one to break the rules that have been established through law in this Assembly. If that's the kind of leadership he expects to see from this Premier, he is dead wrong.

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

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you. I think the Premier was expected to keep his word from the campaign trail, Mr. Speaker.

As the Balzac water transfer makes so clear, there is a process for well-connected people and a process for the rest of us. Given that yesterday the Premier said, and I quote, if there have been promises made by individuals that might have been in government or are no longer in government, then I would like to know about them, end quote, has the Premier bothered to try to find out about those secret promises?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, he's the one that says that there's a secret deal. He was in the scrum yesterday. I asked him right in front of all the TV cameras: you're calling it a secret deal? You're saying to this House, I believe, that there's some sort of a secret deal. You've got the documents. Present them right now, right in front of the cameras.

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

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, the fix is in on this project. This government has placed a \$4.8 million bet that this project will be approved when last August it voted that much money, and I'll quote the government's own budget documents: to support a horse-racing track and equine centre at Balzac. Given that this government destroyed due process last year when it voted the money for this project and various ministers applauded it, will the Premier just save the people of the Red Deer River basin the trouble and cost of fighting the licence and just put an end to this water transfer right now?

1:40

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, the leader mentioned before that I wasn't keeping my promise to those individuals during the campaign trail. Well, we have moved very quickly on the housing strategy. We are negotiating an immigration agreement with the federal government. We've already addressed the issues in Fort McMurray. We've opened this House to more transparency, obviously, with the new agreement we have allowing for greater consideration of business and committee work. I think we've come a long way in the last – what? – 90 days.

**Dr. Taft:** Tell the people of Red Deer.

It's time for this government to stop playing games with Alberta's water. There should be no secret deals for that water. This makes a mockery of due process and the whole issue of consulting with Albertans. To the Premier: why should anybody trust or engage in public consultations with this government when they so clearly ignore the wishes of Albertans?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Well, Mr. Speaker, very clearly because they can trust us to do the right thing. Quite frankly, if the hon. leader is not aware, again, of the process that's in place, the hon. Minister of Environment can certainly articulate it again in the House.

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

#### Temporary Foreign Workers

**Dr. B. Miller:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Armando Garcia, who was introduced earlier, is a temporary foreign worker from Guadalajara, Mexico. He came to Alberta to work on a large farm expecting to receive health benefits, overtime pay, and a reimbursement of travel costs, but instead he faced a broken contract and a restrictive work visa that limits him from finding other employment. This is one case, but I fear it's the tip of the iceberg. As the number of temporary foreign workers entering Alberta increases, many workers are facing similar problems due to this government's failure to ensure that the rights of these workers are adequately protected. My questions are to the Premier. Given that an increase in the number of foreign . . .

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Premier.

**Mr. Stelmach:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do want to of course welcome to this Assembly Armando Garcia from Guadalajara, and I also want to state to this Assembly that I had a very pleasant visit when I was minister of international and intergovernmental relations with the then President, Vicente Fox, who asked this province of Alberta to continue the good working relationship we have with Mexico to allow people from their country to come to our province, work here, earn some money. I was astonished at the amount of GDP, Mexican GDP, that comes from Mexicans that leave their country and send money back to sustain their families back home.

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

**Dr. B. Miller:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will table the employment contract of Mr. Garcia later, and it appears that all kinds of things were broken. Health insurance was promised. Workplace safety insurance was promised. Lots of money was deducted from his paycheque to pay for plane fares. My question, then, is to the Premier. This man has tremendous courage coming here to speak out against his employer. What guarantees are in place to ensure that other employees who are bound to employers through their work visa will be able to speak out without any repercussions?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, in terms of the details, would our minister responsible, at least today, for this issue please give us the details.

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

**Mr. Danyluk:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I want to say that temporary workers receive the same protections as any other workers in Alberta, and I also want to say that the Ministry of Employment, Immigration and Industry will look into this case. In Alberta this is not common. I mean, we take violations of a code very seriously and investigate every complaint that is brought forward, and we need to look at this information and the individual circumstances before we can determine what, if any, potential . . .

**The Speaker:** Hon. member, we've just had another little test of our rule interpretation. That 45-second response time does not include an additional 45 seconds for supplementals.

The hon. member.

**Dr. B. Miller:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I fear that this is the Chinese head tax all over again. People from China came here to help build the railroad, and then they were sent back. A hundred years later the Prime Minister of Canada has to apologize to them. So my question is to the Premier. I mean, are you going to have to be in a position to apologize to these workers for all the poor conditions they've been working under as they are sent back after a year? What kind of experience is this for Alberta?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, when a member of the opposition brings up the Chinese head tax, that was an embarrassment to this country at a very critical stage of development. This is very early in history, but it happened to be the same time that my ancestors came to this country. I fully understand the kind of discrimination that there was at this time, so I don't need any prompting from any opposition member to relate to me some of the issues that early immigrants had to face in this country.

### Climate Change

**Mr. Mason:** Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Environment held a news conference in which he announced that Alberta was taking climate change seriously. He brought documents, he brought questionnaires, and he brought logos. That was five years ago. Today this Minister of Environment went through the same whole dog-and-pony show again. Even the logo is the same. To the Premier: how many times do we have to go through this phony consultation exercise on climate change before the government takes real action to fix the problem?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, given what the minister presented this morning in terms of climate change, I'd allow the minister to answer the question.

**Mr. Renner:** Well, I just very quickly, Mr. Speaker, remind the member that the world that we live in has changed significantly in the past five years, and I look forward to elaborating on further questions.

**Mr. Mason:** Mr. Speaker, they ignored it five years ago. How do we know they won't ignore it today? Here it was five years ago. The same thing, same logo today. The news release from 2002 said, "Results from the consultation process will be used to finalize Alberta's action plan." Which action plan, and when will it really be finalized?

**Mr. Renner:** Mr. Speaker, I have spent the last three months since I was appointed Minister of Environment travelling around the province talking to all of the employees of Environment. The key message that I delivered everywhere I went was: in politics timing is everything. Guess what? The timing is absolutely right, and we are going to be able to do things that previous ministers could only dream of doing. Industry is onside, the public is onside, and the public demands that we take action.

**Mr. Mason:** Mr. Speaker, perhaps the minister could tell us why the government has failed to take action in the past five years? This minister has been a member of that government. This Premier was a member of that government. That caucus hasn't changed, but in five years nothing has been done. What assurances do we have that you're going to do something this time?

**Mr. Renner:** Mr. Speaker, I'd like to remind the hon. member that much has happened over the past five years, beginning with the introduction of Canada's first climate change legislation, the loop on which just closed with the introduction of Bill 3. This consultation takes us positively into the future instead of worrying about the past constantly as the NDP are wont to do.

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

### Industrial Projects in Alberta's Heartland Area

**Mr. Backs:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta industrial heartland bitumen upgraders present a tremendous opportunity for Edmonton and our capital region. Jobs, investment, and growth will all flow. It's like Fort McMurray five years ago and a bit better planned, but are we fully prepared? Regional governance has broken down. Is everyone who should be involved, and are they to the best degree? My constituents at Edmonton-Manning who will work there are very concerned. My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Will we soon see some effective

regional governance mechanism in place to ensure that everyone in Edmonton's million metro region is represented in dealing with massive growth?

1:50

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

**Mr. Danyluk:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. One of my ministry's mandates is to deal with the regional planning issues and the intermunicipal disputes. On March 5 I received recommendations from the Minister's Council on Municipal Sustainability that address these issues. We are currently reviewing this information, and we expect to release our response later this spring. I can assure you that we are taking action to support stronger intermunicipal co-operation in Alberta.

**Mr. Backs:** A supplementary to the same minister: with transportation of workers and materials a key concern for many area residents, what steps has the minister taken to ensure that the various local governments, investors, and our provincial government are co-operating in this area?

**Mr. Danyluk:** Mr. Speaker, this is a critical issue. The province is working with our partners in municipal governments through the minister's council to come up with innovative solutions to those challenges.

**Mr. Backs:** A supplementary to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation, Mr. Speaker: will the minister ensure that the work proceeds quickly to widen highway 28A and take out bottlenecks to ensure the safety of the residents, the schoolchildren, and the thousands of workers that will be travelling that highway to and from work? Will it be safe, and will it be ready?

**Mr. Ouellette:** Well, Mr. Speaker, the government is working with all the municipalities in the industrial heartland area to determine all the overall transportation needs in the area. As part of this we're working on a long-range plan for roads, bridges, and other critical infrastructure throughout the area. The plan will identify the urgent, short-term, and long-term projects, and from there we can prioritize the projects from within the department's construction program.

As always, Mr. Speaker, safety is a very high priority of this government. It's a primary concern. When we look at road projects, we will certainly take all the safety of the drivers, the school buses, and you know what, Mr. Speaker . . .

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

### Climate Change Public Consultation

**Mr. Johnston:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the environment minister introduced the Climate Change and Emissions Management Amendment Act, 2007, that put in place emissions intensity reductions of 12 per cent for large industrial emitters of greenhouse gases. Today the same minister announced that there will be a consultation with Albertans on a new climate change plan for the future. My first question is to the Minister of Environment. Will the minister explain the rationale for this consultation?

**Mr. Renner:** Well, Mr. Speaker, as I previously indicated, Bill 3 really is the culmination of delivering on the climate change policy that was initiated in 2002. This government does take climate

change very seriously, so the announcement that I made this morning is to allow us to engage in consultations that will lead us to the next step. We've dealt with the industrial side, the industrial emitters side. We need to very seriously engage in conversation with Albertans on where we go from here.

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

**Mr. Johnston:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental to the same minister: what topics are Albertans going to be consulted on?

**Mr. Renner:** Well, Mr. Speaker, as I indicated this morning at the news conference, there are some critical issues that I as minister am interested in, not the least of which is: what is the role of government? Should the government be the leader? Should the government be the legislator? Should the government be directing, or should the government be simply educating? Up until now we've had largely a voluntary system in place. There are a lot of things that Albertans have been suggesting could and should happen. I'm looking forward to engaging in that conversation over the next few weeks.

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

**Mr. Johnston:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental, also to the Minister of Environment: how can people in my area get involved in the consultation?

**Mr. Renner:** Well, Mr. Speaker, there will be 10 public meetings throughout the province, and I encourage all Albertans who are able to participate in those public meetings to do so. In addition to that, the fact book and workbook that was introduced this morning is available online, is available on request, and will be available at all MLA offices. I encourage Albertans again to pick up those books and fill out the workbook and submit it.

In addition, I will be meeting with aboriginal groups and other stakeholders to get their feedback, all of which will be incorporated into a revised climate change plan that we will introduce this fall.

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

#### Affordable Housing

**Mr. Taylor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since 2001 the population of this province has gone up over 10 per cent, and housing costs have as much as doubled. The need for affordable housing is a critical issue for Albertans, and as the Minister for Municipal Affairs and Housing well knows, to solve the crisis takes innovation, expertise, money, and the political will to keep the issue at the top of the provincial agenda. The minister's all-party Affordable Housing Task Force report is due to go to the minister next Monday. What will the minister do with the report once he gets it, and when will he release it to the people of Alberta?

**Mr. Danyluk:** Well, Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member has mentioned, yes, the housing task force will report, and hopefully it will report on March 19. We will take that recommendation, and then I will present it to our government for further direction.

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

**Mr. Taylor:** All right. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same

minister: rents are skyrocketing in this province. Will the minister push for a temporary rent regulation capping rent hikes at 10 per cent and change the law to allow only one rent increase per year?

**Mr. Danyluk:** Mr. Speaker, I have not seen the report, and I cannot prejudice or pre-empt what is in that report. That report will be presented to me on March 19, and at that time I will look at it.

**Mr. Taylor:** Understood, Mr. Speaker, but I would have thought the minister would have been getting the same sorts of calls from his constituents that the rest of us are getting from ours.

Given the seriousness of the affordable housing crisis, which dictates that while we're talking about it, we also need to get building, will the minister provide this House today some targets and timelines for some big-time creation of affordable housing sufficient to make a real difference?

**Mr. Danyluk:** Mr. Speaker, again, we established a housing task force to look at the challenges in housing in Alberta and the opportunity for that task force to provide us with recommendations that would help with some of the guidance on where this government needs to go.

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

#### Municipal Growth Pressures in the Capital Region

**Mr. Lukaszuk:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Statistics Canada in its recent report indicates that 50 per cent of the Canadian population now resides in six municipalities, which includes the city of Edmonton. This sudden population growth and urbanization has led to ever-increasing financial strains on the city of Edmonton, which now provides social care, cultural facilities, infrastructure, and other expensive services to the entire capital region. All of these services are funded by Edmontonians through their property taxes. To the minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing: is the minister aware of the revenue and expenditure inequity in the capital region, particularly with reference to the Sturgeon and Strathcona counties, which estimates that the city of Edmonton now provides some \$80 million worth of services to the surrounding region?

**Mr. Danyluk:** Mr. Speaker, in managing growth pressures, the Minister's Council on Municipal Sustainability has brought forward a number of recommendations to address the short- and long-term sustainable funding for all municipalities. On that committee there is representation from the AAMD and C, which represents Sturgeon. There is also representation from the city of Edmonton. A number of the recommendations for the province's consideration address opportunities for strengthening co-ordination and intermunicipal co-operation.

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

**Mr. Lukaszuk:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Reports are great, but how will the minister actually address that inequity?

**Mr. Danyluk:** Well, Mr. Speaker, the municipalities face significant challenges in delivering services and infrastructure to support a growing population and economy. The Minister's Council on Municipal Sustainability has developed a draft report which contains 12 recommendations in three key areas: intermunicipal relationships, roles and responsibilities, and municipal revenue sources.



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

**Mr. Lukaszuk:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last supplemental to the same minister: how will the minister assure Edmontonians that the onset of development in what's known as the industrial heartland will adequately compensate the city of Edmonton for the anticipated influx of services required?

**Mr. Danyluk:** Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, I need to say that Edmonton needs to be involved in the planning with the surrounding communities. This needs to be done, first of all, through communication, collaboration, and co-operation.

## 2:00 Trade, Investment, and Labour Mobility

**Mr. Bonko:** Despite his pledge to govern with openness and transparency, the Premier's comments Monday show that he is not committed to this with respect to the trade, investment, and labour mobility agreement as it was negotiated and written and signed behind closed doors. This Chamber is only now having its say, Mr. Speaker. At best free trade agreements can benefit all involved. We have to be careful, however, that we do not restrict our ability to govern. My questions are to the Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations. What labour groups did the government consult with when it was drafting TILMA to make sure that Alberta workers would not be disadvantaged by this agreement?

**Mr. Boutilier:** Mr. Speaker, this agreement is a North American type of priority that is setting an example. As the Premier said the other day, the Premier of Ontario, the Premier of Saskatchewan, and other Premiers are interested. In fact, we are so open and so transparent that you can see it all on the website any time you wish. I'll give you the website call centre so you can view it for yourself because we are so open and transparent.

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

**Mr. Bonko:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Article 13 of TILMA states that the training standards recognized in one province will be recognized in the other. Since this agreement prohibits discrimination based on provincial standards, will Alberta workers with higher levels of training and certification be disadvantaged by this agreement?

**Mr. Boutilier:** Mr. Speaker, no, they will not.

**Mr. Bonko:** Mr. Speaker, maybe referencing article 13 wasn't specific enough for the minister because I didn't hear him mention it once. Let me help him. Article 13(1) states that "any worker certified for an occupation by a regulatory authority of a Party shall be recognized as qualified to practice that occupation by the other Party." Again, will this mean that Albertans with greater levels of qualifications will be disadvantaged by this agreement?

**Mr. Boutilier:** Mr. Speaker, the answer is no. But let me give you a perfect example. In other words, what the member is saying is that he doesn't want to see others be able to come from British Columbia to Alberta. For instance, an example under the old way it used to be done under the Liberals, that they support, is that a teacher wouldn't be able to come and teach in Alberta. Well, guess what? We want teachers in Alberta because our economy is growing. The Liberals may not, but we do, and that's why TILMA is supported.

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

## C5 Forestry Management Plan

**Mr. Rodney:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In recent weeks I've heard a great deal of criticism from constituents and environmental groups who are very concerned with timber harvesting in the C5 area of southwestern Alberta, a part of the province enjoyed by many, many Albertans. Many are genuinely unclear regarding the government's proposed forest management plan for the area. Could the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development clarify exactly what this plan actually entails?

**Dr. Morton:** Mr. Speaker, I'd like this Assembly to know that the proposed C5 forestry management plan is one of the most progressive developed to date in the history of this province. Because there are no other forestry management agreements in this area, our ministry had a free hand to use the highest industry standards and also do extensive public consultation in developing this plan. The result is a forestry management plan that recognizes that the key is that a healthy forest is the foundation for all other uses – for all other uses – not just forestry but watershed, habitat, biodiversity, tourism, and recreation. C5 does that, and I want to thank publicly today the public consultation committee and my officials for devising such a good plan.

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

**Mr. Rodney:** Thanks, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the same minister. Could the minister please be clear on whether the plan allows clear-cutting in the region or if it ignores watershed issues in C5, as some individuals and groups have suggested?

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

**Dr. Morton:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans should know that less than 1 per cent of the area identified in this plan will be harvested in any one given year, and when harvesting takes place, reforestation will follow immediately. The plan does not call for any massive swaths of clear-cutting. Instead, there will be contour cutting, that protects watersheds and trails and provides protection for other critical areas, and no harvesting will occur in the upper reaches of any watersheds.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Rodney:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question, again to the same minister: if the proposed plan is as appropriate and balanced as we are to believe, why is it that media accounts report the minister as saying that he is delaying his approval?

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

**Dr. Morton:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The answer is very simple. This is a good plan, but it could be made better. That's what we're going to do. The additional time, by deferring approval at this time, will allow me to receive the report of the Oldman River watershed basin committee. I expect that later this summer. I've also spoken with my department officials and asked them to take a second look at the plan, asked them if we couldn't slightly change the orientation and focus of this plan so that it dovetails with the land-use frame-

work, the mandate that our Premier has given me to protect our public forests and areas. I'm asking them to come up with a plan where forestry isn't just the end of the plan but the means by which we achieve other values, and that includes healthy forests, healthy watersheds, habitat for recreation and biodiversity, tourism and recreation, and a healthy and profitable and sustainable forestry industry.

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

### Health Workforce Strategy

**Mr. Martin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government continues to stumble along from one crisis to another. In health care we have severe shortages of nurses and other health workers. We have burnout, we have emergency room crunches, we have bed shortages, and we have other serious problems. The problem is going to get worse before it gets better with this overheated economy. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. How long has the 2006 workplace plan been on the minister's desk, and why has he not made that public?

**Mr. Hancock:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I haven't made the workforce strategy public because it hasn't gone through the policy approval process that we have, where we undertake a careful review before our CPCs, caucus, and cabinet before we adopt a policy and before we implement the policy. I inherited a lot of work that was done by my predecessor and the good folks in the ministry. I am now in the process of collaborating with the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry and the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology and working on the budget and resourcing figures that we can apply to it. But in the process of doing that, of course, there is work being done on workforce strategy. The world doesn't stop as we develop a new plan, and . . .

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

**Mr. Mason:** You're going to have trouble with that, Dave. [interjections]

**Mr. Martin:** You're cutting off my time here.

Mr. Speaker, the problem is that we have a severe crisis now. This was supposed to have been done back in the spring of 2006. Is the minister saying that this report is so damaging to the government that he has to go through another process? This was supposed to be done in the spring of 2006. Why don't we have it now?

**Mr. Hancock:** Absolutely not, Mr. Speaker. Work is happening now. Nurses are being educated in our institutions. Doctors are being educated in our institutions. Personal care aides and LPNs are being educated in our institutions. People are out recruiting internationally for new workers to come. In many different ways we're enhancing. We just signed a deal with the doctors and hope for ratification shortly on that, which will help retain and improve. Lots of things are happening.

The strategy that's being developed, the workforce strategy, which is part of my mandate – and I work collaboratively with the other two ministers I mentioned – is in process. There are lots of good strategies in it in addition to what's already being done.

**Mr. Martin:** Mr. Speaker, Rome burns while Nero fiddles.

The minister is saying that all these things are happening. Is he

not recognizing that there is a crisis? All he has to do is go into the hospitals in both major cities, in Grande Prairie and others. Things are happening right now, and we still don't have a plan. He says that some things are going. This was supposed to be done in 2006. I'm asking the minister: why are we still struggling along without a plan?

**Mr. Hancock:** There appears to be a severe shortage of audiologists as well, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member didn't hear my answer. Work is progressing. The plan will be coming out shortly.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

### Student Transportation

**Mr. Flaherty:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Calgaryans do not have enough local schools to meet their needs, and now their children can't even make it to the schools they have. A shortage of bus drivers has left hundreds of Calgary students out in the cold every day, and the situation is reportedly getting worse. To the Minister of Education: what direct actions has the minister taken to address the issue and get Calgary students to their classrooms safely and on time?

**Mr. Liepert:** Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, no one is being left out in the cold, so let's get that clear. The issue with school bus drivers, whether it's rural or in Calgary or any other region of the province, is no different than the other workforce issues that we're facing today. It's a question of qualified people, enough people to drive buses. The other issue that we have to deal with when it comes to school bus drivers is that a lot of these positions are part-time, and as you well know, it's harder to get part-time folks than full-time.

2:10

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

**Mr. Flaherty:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that both the Catholic and public school boards in Calgary have requested that the minister conduct a review of how the province administers transportation grants, will the minister take up that challenge and do something about it?

**Mr. Liepert:** Well, currently we have a committee that is looking at all of the funding framework for education. It involves the school boards, including the Catholic and public school boards. I look forward to what recommendations they come forward with to put in place a funding framework that is probably more acceptable to those who receive the funds.

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

**Mr. Flaherty:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister admit that the current busing problem is made worse by the government's failure to build local schools in Calgary's new and growing communities?

**Mr. Liepert:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I've made no secret of the fact, since inheriting this portfolio, that one of my priorities is going to be to get schools built where children live. We're working on doing that because, quite honestly, children riding the bus for an hour is not enhancing their education. So we're going to work hard to get schools where children live, and it's going to include some alternative ways of financing those schools.

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

### Barley Marketing

**Mr. Mitzel:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday was the last day for Alberta farmers to mail in their votes for the federal barley plebiscite. Through this plebiscite the federal government indicated that they were consulting western Canadian farmers on their views of how they want to market their barley in the future. I learned from my constituents that the Alberta government had placed advertisements in major rural newspapers, and then I heard these same ads on the radio. Considering that this was a consultation and not a binding vote, my question is to the Minister of Agriculture and Food. Why is the Alberta government spending Alberta taxpayer dollars on advertising to support the market choice option when other provinces either are silent or gave both sides of the issue?

**Mr. Groeneveld:** Alberta's marketing choice support is not new, Mr. Speaker. This has been a long-standing position based on previous votes by farmers. We trust our farmers. Alberta farmers are entrepreneurs who want to compete in the world market. In the past 70 per cent of them have told us that they want choice. If even just 1 per cent wanted choice, they should not be denied that right solely based on the province that they happen to live in.

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

**Mr. Mitzel:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: as some of my constituents have so claimed, did Alberta's ads promote the elimination of the Canadian Wheat Board?

**Mr. Groeneveld:** No, Mr. Speaker, they do not. In fact, every single ad encourages people to vote a competitive wheat board. Under marketing choice the Canadian Wheat Board will truly be able to show its capabilities. We feel it is very important that barley producers can and should be able to continue to support marketing through the Wheat Board if they wish. This is where marketing choice is different than the two other boxes. It's about having the freedom to choose.

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

**Mr. Mitzel:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: of the nearly \$1 million spent on marketing choice over the last four years, can the Minister of Agriculture and Food tell me in this House if all these dollars were spent on advertising?

**Mr. Groeneveld:** Mr. Speaker, as the member said, this money was spent over four years, and less than half of that money went into advertising, newsletters, and website development. Most of it was invested in research and studies of open-market systems like there are in other parts of the world. We're doing our homework, and our studies are publicly available on the website.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

### Private/Public Partnerships

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While an Alberta Liberal government would use the \$7 billion third-quarter surplus revenues to both save for the future and pay off desperate infrastructure needs, this Tory government chooses to go back into debt through P3

alternative financing arrangements for our schools, roads, and hospitals. These same Tories created the current infrastructure crisis through their aversion to debt. The current Premier when minister of infrastructure presided over that policy. My first question is to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. Could he explain to Albertans why we now need to go back into debt to build schools, hospitals, and roads even though we have a surplus of \$7 billion, \$6 billion in . . .

**Mr. Ouellette:** Well, Mr. Speaker, for people that don't know, we're not going back into debt. We've found a way to do some alternative financing, and I'll tell you that it is a way to save taxpayers money, get the job done sooner, and allow jobs to all Albertans. That's what we're doing: better government for Albertans.

**Mr. Chase:** Yeah, and the minister has 30 years to hide out in retirement.

My second question is to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. Does last week's government commitment to cover publicly the cost of overruns at Calgary's much-delayed, much-needed southeast replacement hospital indicate that it has seen the Alberta Liberal light and will reject 30-year P3 debt financing for other projects?

**Mr. Ouellette:** Mr. Speaker, I'm not so sure what the Alberta Liberal light means. I'm not sure there's a light on over there.

Anyway, Mr. Speaker, we do plan on and it's been announced that we are funding the south Calgary hospital, and it will be built as soon as possible.

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

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you. Obviously, the minister is dealing with a 25-watt bulb.

My last question is to the Minister of Education. Why is the minister suggesting that we saddle Alberta taxpayers with a 30-year debt to not only build P3 schools but maintain and operate them privately when we have the money to build them publicly and transparently now? Debt or no debt, Mr. Minister?

**Mr. Liepert:** Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, as we discussed earlier, we need schools where kids live. Despite what this hon. member says, we do not have \$7 billion laying around to spend on schools. There have been a number of P3 and alternative financing projects around the world that have been successful, and there have been a few that have been unsuccessful. The research I did was that every time a P3 was unsuccessful, it was commenced by a Liberal or a socialist government.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

### Dodds-Round Hill Coal Gasification Project

**Mr. Johnson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Environment. Residents of my constituency have great concern about the environmental impacts of a large coal mine and coal gasification project being proposed by Sherritt south of Tofield and Ryley and to the northeast of Camrose. To the minister: how can residents be assured that the province will hear and address their environmental concerns before a decision on this project is made?

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

**Mr. Renner:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can assure the hon. member as well as the residents that he refers to that the review application process that Alberta Environment has includes ample opportunity for the public to voice their concerns. Even before this project can be considered for approval, the company must conduct an environmental impact assessment and submit that to Alberta Environment. This impact will outline all of the potential environmental impacts from the project, and then Alberta Environment will consider the EIA, environmental impact assessment, as well as any statements of concerns from the public before making a decision on this project.

**Mr. Johnson:** To the same minister: what processes can Alberta Environment commit to to ensure that there is a clear understanding of the water quality and quantity impacts of the proposed project?

2:20

**Mr. Renner:** Mr. Speaker, all activities involving water require either a licence or approval from Alberta Environment. We only issue water licences and approvals when we are confident that the quantity and quality of water will not be impacted by the development. We also consider the impacts of the development on other licensed water users. So all potential water impacts will be outlined in the project's environmental impact assessment and will be reviewed by Alberta Environment employees.

**Mr. Johnson:** My last question is to the Minister of Energy. What role does Alberta's Energy and Utilities Board play in reviewing and approving this project?

**Mr. Knight:** Well, Mr. Speaker, certainly this government in place in Alberta today has a plan, and we're on track to build a stronger Alberta. The gasification of coal may just be one step ahead in our plan. The EUB will play a role with respect to permitting. This particular project is in the very early stages at this present time, and an application has yet to be filed. When it is filed, the EUB will take into consideration all of the assessments and the EIA that has been mentioned already by my colleague, and certainly a determination will be made at that point.

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

#### Temporary Foreign Workers

*(continued)*

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Temporary foreign workers here in Alberta are victims of very weak labour laws that are not enforced by this government. This government has no interest in enforcing the laws for temporary foreign workers.

**An Hon. Member:** That's not true.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Of course it's true.

Earlier in question period today the minister of municipal affairs indicated that temporary foreign workers have the same rights as other workers in the province. My first question is to the hon. minister. Why, then, is Armando Garcia working on a corporate farm in eastern Alberta and getting no overtime pay after he puts in his 40 hours a week? This man has worked 189 hours overtime in three months and has not received one extra penny for his efforts. Why is that happening?

**Mr. Danyluk:** Mr. Speaker, as I said previously, this is an individual case, and I will forward that information to the minister in charge, and we will look into it.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Again, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: why is this gentleman from Guadalajara, Mr. Armando Garcia, not being covered by WCB when he's working on that big corporate farm?

**Mr. Danyluk:** Mr. Speaker, it is no different than any other farm worker in Alberta. We will take it under advisement.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Mr. Speaker, this time to the minister of agriculture. This government has a hotline called the Alberta foreign worker hotline. It's a toll-free number within Alberta, which really could read 1-877-LETS-EXPLOIT. This web page is not providing information to farm workers who are on temporary work visas or any other worker on a temporary work visa on what rights they have in this province if they're not satisfied with the job conditions. Will this website start showing workers' rights and where they can go to have those rights enforced?

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

**Mr. Groeneveld:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, the foreign worker program and temporary foreign workers are federal issues that we work under with the other, so I'm sure that the answer to the question would come through them. However, we are very concerned, and we are very appreciative that we do have the temporary foreign worker program for agriculture. It's something that is greatly needed by agriculture, as it is in most of the rest of the country. We're more than happy to work through the federal program and also with the Employment, Immigration and Industry minister on it.

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

#### Deerfoot Trail Maintenance

**Mr. Cao:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The province has helped out the city of Calgary a great deal by taking over the maintenance of the Deerfoot Trail. Given the tremendous growth in Calgary, the Deerfoot Trail carries millions of vehicles a year. My question today is to the hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. What maintenance has been done on the Deerfoot Trail lately?

**Mr. Ouellette:** Mr. Speaker, again, I'd like to reiterate that this government takes safety – and maintenance is part of that – very seriously. The Alberta government has invested over \$200 million to improve Deerfoot Trail since the government took it over in 2000. This year the government will invest a further \$17 million for various Deerfoot Trail projects. As for routine maintenance, our maintenance contractor does a very good job of removing snow, filling cracks, when you consider how much traffic is actually on that road at all times.

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

**Mr. Cao:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Reflecting questions from my constituents about the lighting outage for about a month on the Deerfoot Trail section now known as the Calf Robe Bridge overpass, my only supplemental question to the same minister: when will the lighting be fixed for Calgarians so that we can drive safely at night to that section of the Deerfoot Trail?

**Mr. Ouellette:** Again, Mr. Speaker, safety is a high priority for this government. The Alberta government has a separate maintenance contract with Enmax for overhead lighting on the Deerfoot Trail. In

January Enmax started a maintenance blitz and has been out on the road working when weather and traffic have permitted them to be there. So far, Enmax has replaced or repaired approximately 300 lights, and the contractor is committed to continuing the blitz for as long as it takes. We're also working on better co-ordination, to put all of our contracts together in one to make sure that everyone can be there when needed.

**The Speaker:** Before we move to the next part of the Routine, just so hon. members will be brought up to date, on day 2 of the session we had 84 questions and answers, on day 3 we had 88, yesterday we had 78, and today we had 100. That's not a record, by the way.

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

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

**Bill 19**  
**Appeal Procedures Statutes Amendment Act, 2007**

**Dr. Brown:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 19, the Appeal Procedures Statutes Amendment Act, 2007.

The legislation is intended to modify the current appeal process of the Court of Appeal in hearing appeals from boards or tribunals, and the bill includes minor amendments to eight provincial statutes overall. The amendments are designed to reduce delays and make better use of the court's time.

[Motion carried; Bill 19 read a first time]

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

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that Bill 19 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

**The Speaker:** The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

**Bill 20**  
**Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2007**

**Mr. Snelgrove:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 20, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2007. This being a money bill, His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

[Motion carried; Bill 20 read a first time]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

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

**Mr. Martin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table on behalf of the leader of the NDP opposition two documents. The first is the result of a corporate registries search that shows the voting shareholders of the Holy Cross Manor.

The second is a list of candidates for the PCAA executive committee elections from the PC Party's website.

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

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today, as promised earlier,

to table media reports from the *Drumheller Mail* indicating that the number one story in '06 was the Red Deer River water diversion and quoting this: "During his election campaign, Ed Stelmach was quoted as saying the plan was 'ridiculous'."

Thank you.

2:30

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first one is a letter that I wrote to the now hon. Premier. This letter is dated October 19, 2006. I am asking how the government would plan to get us out of the economic mess caused by electricity deregulation, and I haven't received a response to this letter yet.

My second tabling is in regard to my questions earlier in question period, and it is a document from Public Accounts, year end of March 31, 2005, indicating that for Cliff Paulgaard, who is a principal owner of the corporate farm C.G. Paulgaard Farms Ltd., there was a grant in that year of \$63,400. That was the year 2005.

Thank you.

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

**Dr. B. Miller:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of the employment contract of Armando Garcia, and there's a bill that the hospital wanted him to pay – go to a bank and buy a money order and pay it – and also the pay stubs.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

**The Chair:** I'd like to call the Committee of Supply to order. I would call the President of the Treasury Board to move the estimates.

head: **Interim Supply Estimates 2007-08**  
**Offices of the Legislative Assembly and Government**

**Mr. Snelgrove:** Mr. Chairman, I would like to move the interim supply estimates, and I would like to add to their introduction that these amounts have been derived from the estimates made by their departments and their spending requirements for this period. The amounts reflect the pattern of government spending being higher in the early months than in some of the later months of the year. This pattern occurs because some payments are due April 1 and July 1 for the first and second quarters, and many annual payments fall due April 1.

These payments result from the quarterly and annual spending commitments in all areas of government, responsibilities such as health, education, children's services, and support for seniors. In addition, some payments are related to the seasonal nature of certain types of activities such as construction and agriculture. Spending in many of these areas of government responsibility is subject to a broad range of cost pressures.

These interim supply estimates provide funding authorization only until the main government estimates are approved. Approval of interim supply estimates pending the release and approval of the budget is not unusual for government. This authorization is needed so that hospitals, schools, universities, and so on can continue to

function as usual. Consequently, these interim supply estimates cannot reveal the government's spending plans until all the budget documents are tabled. Those budget documents will include comprehensive budget information in the form of the government's fiscal and business plans, the ministry business plans, and the government estimates. These estimates will be fully debated when the budget documents are tabled.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Hon. members, before I recognize the first speaker, having received no clarification on which order goes first, we will follow the same format as outlined by the Deputy Chair of Committees yesterday.

I'll recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford first.

**Mr. R. Miller:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's my pleasure to rise in response to the request for interim supply from the President of the Treasury Board. My first thought upon hearing the president's comments was that I've heard that speech before, and indeed I have. I'm going to suspect it's probably a script that the government uses every year when they find themselves in a situation where we don't have a budget come the end of the current fiscal year. So you'll have to excuse me if my comments sound familiar as well because even though I don't have a script in front of me as the President of the Treasury Board did, I'm going to guess that I'm going to reiterate similar comments that I've made in the past whenever the government has come looking for interim supply.

It's probably the most frustrating exercise for a member of the opposition: to discuss interim supply. If I can draw a parallel, it would be like my 15-year-old daughter coming to me and saying: "Dad, I need a thousand dollars. Oh, and I'll tell you next week what I'm going to do with it." [interjection] The President of the Treasury Board just told me that his daughter does that. I've had that experience, and I'm going to guess several members have. Certainly many taxpayers in Alberta have had that experience. I'm going to suggest that for most of us, probably the vast, vast majority of us when that happens, the answer is either (a) "No way" or (b) "Not until you tell me exactly what you're going to do with it." So we've got a situation here where the government is now asking for nearly \$10 billion, and they're saying: "Don't worry about it. Trust us. We'll tell you in a month and a few days what we're going to do with it."

I know it's a *fait accompli*. I know it has to happen. I understand that there are certain requirements at the beginning of the year that make it mandatory to have a little more money than might be expected if you were to ration it out over the year. I understand all of those things. As I say, we've been here before. But I hope that the President of the Treasury Board and government members in general understand how frustrating an exercise it is for those of us on this side of the House when we're expected to approve nearly \$10 billion without anything more than a single line item in the document that they've presented and absolutely no explanation as to where that money might be used or what it might not be used for. So I just hope that everybody in this House will recognize the difficult position that this puts members of the opposition in when we are asked to have this debate today and tomorrow.

Now, the President of the Treasury Board did reference the fact that there are certain obligations that are seasonal and certain obligations that are front-end loaded, as it were. But I just note that three years ago we were in a similar situation, and Bill 24, which was at that time the interim supply act, asked for \$5.5 billion, and three years later we are asking for nearly double the amount. Although, as I say, I recognize some of these peculiarities that exist

in terms of front-end loading and seasonal expenditures, I don't believe that we've had a hundred per cent inflation in the last three years. So that would be a question. I'm wondering: if three years ago \$5.5 billion was sufficient for the government to get through until the time that a budget was passed, why is it that here in 2007 we're looking at nearly double the amount being requested by the government?

I'd also like to opine, I suppose, about the need for a long-term savings plan. I know that the President of the Treasury Board and the Finance minister have both talked about having a surplus plan or some sort of a surplus allocation plan in the budget that we're going to see on the 19th of April. That, as you will know, Mr. Chairman, isn't good enough for the Official Opposition.

We have argued and presented a bill in this House, which, unfortunately, not even one single Conservative member voted in favour of, that would have established a nonrenewable resource savings plan which would have seen 30 per cent of all revenues from nonrenewable resources put into savings. That, unfortunately, was not successful even in passing second reading in this House, which is really too bad because it would have been great to at least have had the debate. However, we have no idea from this whether or not that might actually be part of it, and in fact we don't even know if there's a surplus plan involved with this because, as the minister outlined, they're not able to give us anything more than a single line item on each of these points.

2:40

The new government has talked an awful lot about openness and transparency. This is not an idea that springs from the new Premier. In fact, this is an idea that the Official Opposition has been calling for for a long time: more openness and transparency in government. Mr. Chairman, I would submit to you that it's just one more in a long stream of great ideas that have been generated by the Official Opposition caucus that this government has chosen to adopt. And you know what? More power to them. If that is our role for the time being as we serve in opposition, to supply great policy initiatives to the government and have them adopt them, that's not necessarily a bad thing.

The sustainability fund, which the government is mandated to keep 2 and a half billion in and currently sits at somewhere in excess of \$6 billion, was actually the initiative of a former Leader of the Official Opposition, Dr. Ken Nicol from Lethbridge. Of course, once the government adopted it, it changed names from a stability fund to a sustainability fund. Nevertheless, it was an idea of the Official Opposition that the government saw merit in and chose to adopt. So, as I say, if openness and transparency is sort of one of the new buzzwords or one of the five planks of the new government, we're certainly going to hold their feet to the fire because it was something that we've been talking about for a long, long time.

Mr. Chairman, as I say, I've expressed a great deal of frustration with the fact that we don't have dollars tied to actual programs here. One of the things that concerns me – and I know my colleague from Lethbridge-East will speak to this later on, when she has the opportunity to come up – is whether or not there will be funding in this \$10 billion that we're debating today for the long-term care committee's recommendations. As we know, the government has put some money towards those recommendations: far, far short of the \$250 million that that panel called for. In the meantime the situation has become absolutely desperate in terms of long-term care and their needs, particularly as it revolves around the labour shortages and the difficulties that care facilities are having attracting workers but many, many other issues, many of which have been spoken about and, as I say, a number of which I know the Member for Lethbridge-East will reference later today.

Mr. Chairman, there was an awful lot of concern expressed in my constituency recently about the need for an overpass to be built at 23rd Avenue and Calgary Trail. I'm hopeful that there may actually be some money in this \$10 billion that would go to the city of Edmonton to help them get that done. We'll find out, I suppose, in five weeks or so whether or not that's the case.

This is a huge issue for not just the constituents of Edmonton-Rutherford but, frankly, for anybody who comes into Edmonton on the Queen Elizabeth highway or anybody who's hoping to leave Edmonton or, for that matter, anybody who's even doing business or commuting, visiting family members, whatever the case may be in south Edmonton. The problems created right now, particularly at 23rd Avenue with the South Edmonton Common development and now the Century Place development that's taking place, are huge. I would hope that there may be some relief here for the city of Edmonton so that they could proceed with that very worthwhile and very much needed development.

Another issue that is of particular concern to the residents of Edmonton-Rutherford, Mr. Chairman, would be the extension of the LRT project to the Century Place development: again, the sooner the better. I know that right now there is funding to move that project forward, and I know that it is actually going to happen. But as an example, we had a situation here just recently where the parents, teachers, and students at both Harry Ainlay high school and Louis St. Laurent high school were hoping to have at the minimum an underpass or an overpass over 111th Street, if not an actual station put in at that location, to prevent serious accidents and injuries taking place, and that is not going to happen due to budgetary concerns.

Again, I would hope that there may be some money in here that would address that situation and perhaps allow for an extra station or a safe crossing for students and users of those schools at 111th Street, but I'm not sure. Whether or not I get an answer from the minister on that, I don't know, but again certainly that is something that the constituents of south Edmonton are hopeful of and would dearly love to see.

Now, there are a number of departments, Mr. Chairman, that I would like to point out in particular. I suppose that we'll start with the Legislative Assembly and an interim supply of \$19.8 million being asked for to carry on the operations of this Assembly. I'm going to guess that some of that might actually be to make sure that myself and my colleagues in the room today get paid after April 1, so that would be a good thing. I know that, like most Albertans, the members of this Assembly depend on their paycheques, so I'm not so sure that I would disagree with the idea that we support the Legislative Assembly. Whether or not \$20 million is required to get us through to mid-June or so, when the full budget will be passed, I don't know. Once again, other than to say expenses and equipment, there's no explanation as to what exactly that money might be used for.

I'm going to point out in particular the departments that I am the shadow minister for, and I'll allow my colleagues to then do the same for theirs: \$33 million for the Department of Finance, Mr. Chairman, again for expense and equipment/inventory purchases, with no explanation as to what that might be, and another \$15 million for nonbudgetary disbursements, an awful lot of money again being asked for without any real explanation as to why or how it might be used.

Probably even more important, I would think, are the requests for funding for Service Alberta and the Treasury Board. Service Alberta is looking for \$98 million for expense and equipment/inventory purchases, and Treasury Board \$6.4 million. The reason I say more important, Mr. Chairman, is because as the President of the Treasury

Board would acknowledge, these are new departments. Given that they're new departments, I think it would be fair to say that there's still some shakedown taking place in terms of what exactly each department is responsible for, the shuffling that has taken place back and forth in terms of who's responsible for what. We're asked to give in excess of a hundred million dollars to these two new departments, without any explanation at all as to how that money is being used.

We don't even know, quite frankly, Mr. Chairman, how many full-time employees might be employed by each of those departments. We don't know exactly what programs and services they're funding out of this hundred million dollars that they're asking for in interim supply. As I say, because it's a brand new department, there's no history that we can look at. We can't look at that department and say: well, last year they spent – you know, I'll just pick a number – \$500 million, so it would be fair to give them \$100 million in interim supply. We can't do that because it's a brand new department.

So in particular I would look to the President of the Treasury Board for a little more explanation in terms of why Service Alberta needs \$98 million and exactly how that money might be spent over the next couple of months while we're waiting for a budget to be passed and, likewise, exactly how \$6.4 million is going to be used to fund the operations of the Treasury Board over the next couple of months. Again, Mr. Chairman, because we do not have any historical data to go by. We don't know how many employees are there, and we don't know what their plans might be in terms of running programs. I think that requires a little more detail than just the single line item that we're given here.

With those comments, I'm going to take my seat and allow others to ask some questions. I would hope that the President of the Treasury Board might be able to answer some of those for me today, and if not, I would hope that we can hear some sort of a response prior to being asked to vote on interim supply amounts tomorrow afternoon.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

**The Chair:** The hon. Minister of Service Alberta and President of the Treasury Board.

2:50

**Mr. Snelgrove:** Thank you. I don't think that it will come as a surprise to the hon. member that I think this process of interim supply needs to end, and I have to give a lot of credit to the House leaders and to our new Premier, who said: let's start setting a date for a budget to be brought in. So from that point of view, I absolutely agree. I think we use a lot of time in here – I agree – but I think the hon. member would understand why it has to be done in this way to preserve the integrity of the budget. You know, history sometimes gives us rules we live by that are necessary. The idea that this is bigger than normal: while I give the House leaders credit for our new change, I also have to point out that we could still be here in July if we want to debate that budget long enough. That's right. July, Dave. [interjections] I could have just been saying some other name. I didn't mean him.

Yes, the process needs to change. Bringing in a budget on February 22, having the full debate before this time will be absolutely light years ahead for all: for you, for us, for our departments. It means maybe moving up our work in the fall as we develop it, and that's fine. That's what we're paid to do. But pass that. To try and speculate what might be in the budget or what might not be wouldn't really be fair. As you can probably appreciate, there are very separate issues here with the Minister of Finance and the President

of the Treasury Board. The budget projection is solely the purview of the Minister of Finance, and we would not want to prejudice or even to speculate what might be in there from the department.

So I take the hon. member's comments, and we will have a broad discussion when the budget is brought down. I think his points around the process are right on.

**The Chair:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I also thank the Treasury Board minister for his indication that things will improve. I look forward to those improvements. We saw an improvement today in the House. Through a more transparent, accountable procedure we were able to get through a hundred questions, so we're moving in the right direction. I appreciate the President of the Treasury Board indicating that things will get better.

We have to deal with what we currently have, though, and that's what I'll discuss. We all remember that we had barely a week in terms of a fall Legislature. It basically went into the tail end of August and, I believe, a little bit into September. Had we had a fall sitting, possibly there would have been greater preparation potential of transfer. We would all have been in the House, and this work could have been done.

As it was, with the retirement of our former Premier a leadership race was called. That leadership race took up a certain amount of time, and we're basically trying to catch up for that lost time. Normally the House would have sat around the 21st of February, or usually just after Family Day. We find ourselves continually playing catch-up. We won't hear what the actual budget figures are until April 19, and obviously we can't have the legislative process and Albertans come to a grinding halt because there is no money to cover their programs.

In terms of improvements that I would like to see made, I frequently get the idea that there are almost two blue books: one for the opposition members that is a very thin version and then another book of a different colour that the government has that actually provides the details behind the millions and billions of dollars that are being called for in interim supply. Again, I want to echo what the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford pointed out. We have one-line items, and we have no idea what constitutes billions of dollars of justification for a one-line item, and to debate or discuss or approve with any understanding or basis of knowledge is absolutely impossible.

Possibly at some point in the future – trust us – will be something through the joint policy committees, et cetera, that we're moving toward which will be easier, but we're still, unfortunately, stuck in that old circumstance where information is power, and without information you're, to a great degree, powerless.

To go through the budget, we have support to the Legislative Assembly, expense and equipment/inventory purchases of \$19,800,000. If I understand this correctly, this is to get us toward the middle of April, and then I gather that some of that money will be spent later on, and we'll get a little bit more qualification for it. Again, I'm not sure, and I'd look forward to the minister explaining to me where \$19 million goes between now and April 19 in support to the Legislative Assembly. For example, is that part of our constituency budget? All these questions I would appreciate having answered.

Office of the Auditor General: \$6,200,000 for expense and equipment/inventory purchases. Again, I very much value the office of the Auditor General, and I also feel very privileged to be on the Public Accounts Committee, to which the Auditor General reports on a weekly basis when the Legislature is sitting. Now, thanks to the

wonderful arrangements of our House leaders, we will be able to meet outside of the Legislature. Again thanks to our House leaders we will have a budget for research, and we will not just be restricted to having the ministers and their aides come before us, but we can look beyond, to a variety of health regions and school boards. We have almost unlimited possibilities as to who we can call before us to account. So I think that helping out the Auditor General is a great expense.

In Public Accounts this morning the Auditor General asked us to consider prior to next week if we would benefit from a double reporting. In other words, instead of the great large reporting process that we receive at the end of the year, he's indicating his willingness to provide us with two reports. I think that this is absolutely wonderful in terms of the accountability and that the Auditor General obviously needs that extra financial support, particularly if he's going to put out two annual reports instead of the current voluminous, large one, that is very inclusive and conclusive.

Now, we have the office of the Ombudsman receiving \$800,000. Again, the Ombudsman is a very busy person in this province. There are a number of complaints that are brought to the Ombudsman because of concerns over how they were treated, whether they received their AISH payments, whether the AISH payments were sufficient, whether a person on long-term disability was suddenly cut off and forced to go prematurely onto the Canada pension plan, whether a person has been mistreated; for example, if they were promised that their 15 or 14 and a half years of service for the federal government in the military would be guaranteed as part of their pensionable service and for their participation within the provincial government's auspices. That Ombudsman is a very, very busy individual, and this money, this \$800,000, is probably well spent.

The office of the Chief Electoral Officer is asking for an increase or a temporary holdover of \$2,100,000. Now, among the expense and equipment/inventory that the Chief Electoral Officer is purchasing, I would like to think that possibly it's cameras so that we could have photo identification for all voters who come up on voting day. Although they may be of a homeless nature, they can say: "Well, I'm at the Calgary Drop-In Centre," or "I'm at the Mustard Seed. This is who I am." Possibly they don't have the money to afford a vehicle, and therefore they're not likely to have a driver's licence. Potentially the office of the Chief Electoral Officer could use some of this \$2 million to ensure that every single Albertan has the opportunity, should they wish, to have secure photo identification, that will allow them to then participate fully without a doubt as to their identity during the election process.

3:00

This is something for the health minister – I'm very pleased to see his attendance today – to consider because the health card could be a secure card in terms of identification with a picture, and that would eliminate the production of numerous copies of health cards, which have been in circulation far beyond our population yet are used as a piece of identity. So this could very well be a direction that the Chief Electoral Officer might consider. We know in Calgary, for example, the problems we had with ward 10. One of our members opposite knows very much the difficulties. I won't name that individual out of respect.

The office of the Ethics Commissioner. Now, again, the Ethics Commissioner is a very busy man. I know that both the NDP opposition and the Liberal opposition keep him hopping in asking him to inquire as to the appointments of individuals onto numerous patronage-style committees, so the Ethics Commissioner is indeed a busy man. Whether it's the royalties task force, whether it's a



health board appointment, there are a lot of individuals whose ethical background and research and potential conflicts of interest need to be considered. If \$200,000 is sufficient for the Ethics Commissioner to carry out a full review of conflict of interest, then I don't have a whole lot of difficulty with that amount.

The office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner. Now, here's an area that I worry about. If the Information and Privacy Commissioner is being granted \$1,600,000, then why do we opposition Liberals, opposition NDP, our independent, and our member of the Alliance have to pay prohibitive amounts in FOIP requests to get information that is readily available to government members?

When we're talking open and transparent, let's look at FOIP costs, that are similar to those of the federal government. FOIP has become a burial instrument. It doesn't protect the rights of individuals. It looks like potentially the government spent \$1,600,000 for a big shovel to bury information rather than making it available, so I question that particular expenditure, but again I would like to hear more detail.

So to this point the total expenditures that I have just related to you on six departments is up to \$30,700,000. Now we come to Advanced Education and Technology with the former minister here present. I know how hard he worked as the former minister of advanced education, and I very much appreciate the work that he did.

I might also indicate that without purchasing a Conservative membership, I supported and indicated to others my support for him as the potential new Conservative Premier. It didn't work out that way, but I am pleased to see that he arrived safe and sound back in a front-bench position because I do see him as a man of integrity. As I have mentioned before, I credit him along with our House leader and the hon. NDP House leader for coming up with a progressive change in Standing Orders and regulations.

However, within the advanced education \$728 million I would love to know how that breaks down. For example, what portion would Bow Valley College get? What portion would Mount Royal College get? How about the Alberta College of Art and Design, the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology, and, of course, the area that I represent proudly, and that is the University of Calgary?

Now, Harvey Weingarten, the president of the University of Calgary, felt the need to borrow 1 and a half billion dollars to expand the University of Calgary's campus and programs so that we could be a world-class institution. The expansion is proceeding at a rather slow pace, I must admit. I'm up at the university on a regular basis, and I've yet to see footings, for example, for the digital library, which is going to benefit all Alberta. But if the president of the University of Calgary had received some of this money that he has been requesting for some time, he possibly wouldn't have had to put the University of Calgary at the financial risk of borrowing 1 and a half billion dollars.

I'm sure that there are members – and I don't want to get into Lethbridge. I'll leave that to my confident and competent colleague from Lethbridge-East. I'm sure she'll have questions. But I cannot think of too many better investments of money than postsecondary, whether it's for trade training, whether it's for academic pursuits, whether it's just the general improvement and understanding, arts and humanities, culture. This money could potentially be extremely well spent, but I have no idea from this line item, that indicates that \$728,800,000 has been expended on equipment and inventory purchases and an additional \$27,900,000 has been spent on nonbudgetary disbursements. I consider myself an educated man, but I have no idea what nonbudgetary disbursement items might include.

Under Agriculture and Food, expense and equipment: \$205 million. Well, that's probably in line as an expense. Alberta's third most important industry in terms of the money that it returns to the province or that it brings in would be agriculture. In fact, I guess, agriculture and forestry are similar in importance. We know that their sort of economic produce pales in comparison to oil and gas, but their practices are considerably less impactful on our environment.

Now, hopefully in Agriculture and Food there is no more expenditure. There is no more money that is going to suggest that the Canadian Wheat Board should get out of the business. I know previously somewhere from the government expenditures that almost a million and a half dollars went to discourage our current system, a system that seems to be extremely well supported in Saskatchewan and Manitoba. If a free-vote opportunity was provided without having to have an identifying number at the end of your ballot, I think more Albertans would feel that the status quo is the way to go. And those few entrepreneurial types who want to make money at the other operators' expense: we would see them for what they were. The time they spent in jail: well, that's an indication. This government seems to want to do away with co-operatives, and that's what the Wheat Board in fact is.

3:10

Children's Services: \$311 million, expense and equipment. I can't think of a better area to expend money on than Children's Services. We have a new minister, and I appreciate the fact that she is quickly getting onto that job. I guess that maybe if I look at the \$11 million of the \$311 million, that's approximately how much, I believe, was given to child care service providers to increase accreditation, subsidize spaces. Again, because the minister is here, she can probably provide a little bit more detail on the money that was expended on Children's Services.

However, this province is the only province that doesn't provide funding for child care past age six. In other words, this government assumes that once a child is in the school system, if they're capable of being in the school system, automatically all of their care concerns are over. Well, as a schoolteacher of 34 years I want to point out that schools are more than babysitting services. While we do care for children within the facility, we also educate them. We also help them to develop concerns of citizenship. We work on their cultural and artistic abilities. We do more than care for them.

What is not happening in this province and what is necessary is that child care provisions, both private and public, are increased. I had a very interesting conversation with a lady by the name of Bev Smith. Bev Smith is an extremely strong advocate for stay-at-home parents.

I look forward to a second opportunity if such provides.

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

**Mr. Eggen:** Thanks, Mr. Chairman, and I appreciate an opportunity to speak on the interim supply estimates. I would like to focus my comments in regard to education specifically, and I do have a number of questions if the hon. minister would be so kind as to enlighten myself and whoever else might be interested.

These interim supply estimates in regard to education seem to represent somewhere between 20 and 25 per cent of the total operating budget for the ministry. I wanted to make particular note that the estimates have been allocated for what is said to be expenses and equipment/inventory purchases, and it seems to be quite a significant increase over last year's numbers.

Of course, these mostly represent one-off sorts of purchases for

the ministry for things like furnishings, display cabinets, and equipment such as lab equipment and whatnot. But, you know, my concern for this long-term expenditure and the whole issue of obsolescence and wear and tear on equipment is that I'm wondering if these are expenses rolled into the core operating budget of the ministry.

Again, I would ask if we could expect sustained and guaranteed funding in the long term for such expenses because what we've seen happen in the last 10 to 15 years in public education is that, especially with school-based funding, schools have had to make decisions about letting those things go for a longer period of time since they have to focus on making sure that there's a teacher in front of the class and some books; you know, very immediate basics to look after. Those other items such as furniture and whatnot, that have a longer obsolescence period, have been neglected, so what we're seeing now is lots and lots of schools with some long-term equipment requiring some financial assistance for replacement. Thus, I believe and I think schools would believe that that belongs in part of the regular budget. Put it back, basically, something that's been in short supply over this last long period of time, since at least 1993.

It is, in fact, a strategic priority of the Education ministry to address schools' infrastructure needs, so I would like to ask a number of questions in that regard as well. For one, how in fact can this government continue its commitment to address infrastructure when, for example, our own public school system here in Edmonton states a need for 13 new schools and the ministry is committed to eight? I see a basic discrepancy there that certainly cuts short Edmonton public's capacity to replace older schools and to build into new areas. Again, sort of a way by which shortages are being planned here, and it just creates more stress on other parts of the budget.

You know, given that the 2004-2005 budget identified approximately 530 schools nearing the end of their life cycle in this province, requiring an additional expenditure for renewal or for replacements, how much of this money will be needed to ensure that even minimum standards are maintained in schools throughout the province? I think we have still a real discrepancy between what the reality is for long-term infrastructure investment and what our budgetary allocations are here, and I would like to see that addressed in this coming budget, as would thousands of students and teachers and parents across the province.

I am starting to hear more substantively that the answer the minister is looking towards in this government is using public/private partnerships to meet this shortfall, and I guess, obviously, we have a number of serious concerns in regard to using the P3 model for schools and for public infrastructure construction in general. I think the issue was in fact brought up here today – and it's a very valid one – that we are simply deferring the cost and taking it off an annual budget when we use P3s, but we are really applying that cost over a much longer period of time, whatever the contract is for, and for at least a 10 to 30 per cent increase from what the public construction of any given structure would be, not to mention other subsidiary bills that come from a private/public partnership. You know, this is a basic financial problem, but I believe that, particularly when applied to public schools, it has specific education issues and problems as well that need to be addressed or considered very clearly when we're talking about using P3s to build schools.

For example, back in 1999 Calgary's the Hamptons elementary school was built using the P3 model. Six months after it was built, the school developed cracks in its tiles and drywall, roof leaks, faulty heating and mechanical systems, and \$120,000 was needed to bring the school up to an acceptable standard. So I ask whether or not that

is, in fact, value for our money, number one, and number two, is that a reasonable expectation for the safety and comfort and health of students and teachers working in a school like that built through the P3 model?

Since this risk management model is such a big issue within P3 projects, I ask: who is going to manage the risk to safety of our children and of workers in these P3 schools and take responsibility before we end up with a substandard school being built, as we saw with the Hamptons elementary school project P3 experiment? You know, once you commit to the bricks and mortar of however you happen to build something, a school in particular, and you find it coming up deficient, it causes a tremendous amount of instability in regard to the educational needs of students and a loss of public monies from school boards. I would venture to say that the risks outweigh the benefits by a long shot in regard to using the P3 model to build public schools in the province of Alberta.

3:20

Also in regard to the Education budget, then, I just wanted to address briefly the staff, specifically librarian, shortfall in the province of Alberta. The ministry has a business plan that states that it supports the healthy development of Alberta children and youth. Those are their priorities 6 through 9 in the business plan, yet once again I see that, in fact, the number of full-time equivalents, FTEs, for librarians has dropped from 81.7 FTEs to 12.1 FTEs in the last decade while high school counsellor FTEs have dropped from 99.1 FTEs to 43.8. I would beg to ask this question: how can we ensure, as it's sometimes put in this House and as I certainly would aspire to, the best education system in the world when critical components to our children's education and intellectual development are not just lagging but, in fact, dropping precipitously? I would ask what the minister would like to do to rectify this decade-long free fall in regard to staffing levels in the key areas of librarians and counsellors. I think that this is particularly noteworthy.

You know, in relation to this as well, although the government and the ministry specifically commissioned the Learning Commission to gather up a very interesting and worthwhile report, the key recommendation of the Learning Commission was to reduce the class size average across the province. In so many school divisions we're not seeing a drop in class sizes and student-teacher ratios, but in fact we're seeing increases, especially in the higher grades. There's a certain point where students' education quality drops significantly with the size of the class. I know from personal experience that certainly anything that exceeds 30 students per class has a genuine and immediate impact in lowering the capacity for the students to achieve, and this is a very common number that is used as a standard throughout high schools around the province.

You know, I think we have to take a hard look at these things. If we do in fact want to not just build but maintain a high-quality public education system over the long term, it really does live or die in the quality that we provide to the classroom on the ground level. While we do have lots to be proud of in terms of our public education system, there are several places where we must change and focus the way that we do things. The number one statistic, Mr. Chairman, that comes to my mind is in regard to high school completion rates.

We have an embarrassingly low high school completion rate in the province of Alberta. This doesn't bode well just for now but for our long-term future as well because, you know, that really limits the capacity for our students to become gainfully employed and independent, not just now but throughout their lives. These completion rates must increase. They must be brought up to at least the Canadian average level immediately to determine that we will

stay competitive and looking after the full needs of our public here in the province over the near and long-term future.

Finally, before I finish off, I just wanted to speak about the First Nation and Métis education programs here in the province of Alberta. Again, this is a focus area that I believe requires and deserves adequate support. You know, I would like to ask the question, if the minister can tell me, of how they are looking at comparing the high school completion rates against the rest of the population. Are we keeping accurate figures as to tracking where those numbers are, specifically, for First Nation and Métis students throughout the province of Alberta? I would like to ask as well: to what extent has the government implemented and acted upon the recommendations in the native education policy review by the Métis Nation of Alberta Association, given that that report was in fact requested by the Education ministry of Alberta in the first place? Finally, what does the minister intend to do in taking steps to ensure that aboriginal students are being better served in this province?

Those are my comments, Mr. Chairperson, in regard to the interim supply estimates specific to Education. I look forward to working with the minister to ensure that, in fact, we continue to build a strong public education system here in the province.

Thanks.

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

**Mr. Liepert:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to make a couple of comments. Unfortunately, I can't be in the House tomorrow, so I'd like to respond to some of the comments of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

One of the difficulties with interim supply is that you are talking about budget expenditures that are going to be coming in a budget that you can't talk about, so it does present some difficulties. However, as was mentioned by my colleague the President of the Treasury Board, the government has a responsibility to keep the trains running on time, and we could be somewhere into the month of late May or June before the budget is actually approved, so these funds are obviously required on an interim basis.

I guess there were some general comments at the outset relative to what kinds of expenditures are being asked for. Keep in mind that 97 per cent of the dollars in the Department of Education's budget flow through two school boards, so in reality there's nothing here that isn't along the lines of normal funding of school boards and other school facilities throughout the province.

The member talked a fair bit about infrastructure and about P3s. I guess it really comes down to a philosophical difference of opinion as to whether government should build, own, and operate every building in the province or whether this should be a joint effort between the private sector, the communities, and government.

It's amazing that every time members of the opposition talk about failed P3s, they bring up the situation of the Hamptons school in Calgary. If the hon. member would care to check with the Calgary public school board, the Hamptons school was not a P3 school that was constructed in conjunction with the Calgary public school board. I would suggest that if the hon. member wants to talk about P3s and wants to talk about Calgary and wants to talk about the Calgary public school board, why don't we talk about the Radisson school, which is a P3 model that has been incredibly successful?

All I can say relative to infrastructure funding going forward on alternative financing models is that the costs will be weighed at the outset, and we will be getting the best value for dollars for the taxpayer. In addition to that, there will be no schools constructed in this province through any kind of alternative financing arrangements

that don't meet the infrastructure standards that exist today for government-funded schools.

Just a couple of other quick comments. There are a couple of questions that the hon. member asked that I will take away and get more detailed answers for, but I think it's really important to touch on the comments made relative to the Learning Commission. The member was critical of the fact that we haven't met the class size initiative as recommended by the Learning Commission, and that simply is not the case. In fact, we have implemented the Learning Commission's recommendations on class sizes in a three-year period when it was recommended in five years. Now, there are some tweaks that need to take place. There are certain circumstances where due to the kinds of classes that particular schools are offering – there are some school boards that offer a higher percentage of classes in career and technology studies, as an example, that end up having smaller classes and thereby tend to impact the academic classes. But on average with very few exceptions we have met the class-size initiative as outlined by the Learning Commission.

3:30

The member also mentioned completion rates, and as he will know, that is one of the objectives that the Premier has outlined in my particular mandate letter. I agree: it's not acceptable. While the curve chart is moving in the right direction, it's not moving at a fast enough pace.

There were a couple of other questions that I would like to get some more detailed answers for, and I will supply them to the member.

**The Chair:** The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

**Ms Pastoor:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm always amazed, as some of my other colleagues have pointed out in amazement, with a budgeting process that manages to have a fairy godmother that can come along and snap her fingers and give you approximately \$10 billion to be bailed out because you didn't do the budgeting process correctly in the first place. That is amazing. I really wish I had someone to help me with my books when I'm trying to balance my bank accounts.

One of the things that I'd like to make note of is the \$800,000 for the office of the Ombudsman. It's one of the least amounts that is being asked for. Now, because they need such a small amount, does that mean that they are better than any other department at doing their budgeting? To me this is one of the most important offices that we have. I know that through my office I have many, many constituents that by the time they come to me are at the end of their tether. They're really at the end of the road. They have tried everything possible to be able to have some problem or issue that they have with the government solved. My office has a very good rapport with the Ombudsman's office, and there have been many, many cases that have been settled satisfactorily. I believe that this is a very important office for the frustrated citizens of Alberta. So if they can do such a good job in their budgeting, I can't imagine why the rest of them can't.

Under the expenses part of Education I guess my question would be: how much of those expenses actually go for salaries? I'm really concerned about extra dollars that we're going to need to complete our west Lethbridge high school. Certainly, phases 1 and 2 are going to be okay, but by the time that building is built, it basically will be obsolete by the number of children that we need to put in it, and I think it's very important that that be noted.

The other question, just sort of a basic question for all of the different departments, is: where are the interim dollars being spent?

Are these catch-up dollars, or are these dollars that are actually being used to perhaps meet new programs? Or even better, are they actually being used to meet recommendations that would have come down from the Auditor General's report, in my case certainly within Seniors and Community Supports?

Seniors and Community Supports: \$567 million is not to be sneezed at. It's sort of a cache of cash that I'm hoping would be partly to increase staffing and, certainly, under the PDD to retain the staff that we already have. Staffing in the social services in this province is one of the main issues that exists in terms of not being able to deliver really good care and to be actually allowing other people to be able to come into the system that need it. I'm referring to persons with developmental disabilities, those going into long-term care, those requiring home care, the private delivery of care to those who live in lodges, enhanced lodges, supportive living, assisted living, and designated assisted living, all of which appear to have different designations and different sorts of definitions on how they apply with each different region.

There seems to also have been perhaps a misunderstanding about what it really means to be in care. Now, my definition is: anybody who is receiving any kind of care that is delivered. I don't really care who delivers it, as long as it's being paid out of the public purse. Often it's more medical care. It would be people who require home care: bandage changes, checking on people who have left hospital early. That is medical care that's being delivered. As I said, I don't really care who delivers it, but I would like to think that some of these dollars are going to go to increase the staffing in all of these various delivery systems that are working in our social systems in this province, not just in health care but, as I've mentioned, home care and certainly in child care.

The other thing that I would like to see is that some of these dollars would be used in terms of the staffing and that they actually are creating more full-time jobs so that people are not bouncing between two jobs. Actually, some people are working 16 hours and seven days a week. That's very, very unacceptable in terms of their safety and certainly the stress that they're under within their own lives. How can we expect them to look after others when they can't look after themselves? It had been mentioned that \$250 million will be required to meet the recommendations of the Auditor General. I know that we're just talking about interim right now, but I'm hoping that some of these dollars would at least be a part of that \$250 million. I think I've mentioned that I would look at raises for our present workers.

There were a couple of recommendations for regional health authorities, and one of them was talking about capital and operating funding decisions. One of the recommendations was that the funding decisions for regional health authorities be co-ordinated. I think that's a very good idea. We appear to have some kind of competition between our different regional health authorities, which I don't think is healthy. I think it creates division in the province. To follow up on the co-ordination of the funding, I'd also like to of course see standards that were provincially defined and, again, that they would also be co-ordinated through the regions in the province.

The other recommendation from the Auditor General under health is that the Department of Health and Wellness would retain the documentation and support for its global funding methodology decisions. I'm hoping that some of these dollars might go towards that. I think it's very, very important that the people of Alberta understand how some of these decisions are being made. Decisions are being made with the same dollars, and some are going towards acute care and long-term care, but some of it is going towards health and wellness.

I would really like to see exactly how they make the decisions on

health and wellness as opposed to looking after the seniors that are in long-term care or those that are in assisted living, anyone in continuing care, which isn't just seniors, of course. It could well be the 42-year-old with muscular dystrophy. It could be young men with brain injuries. It can be anybody that's in care. It isn't just seniors.

So with those comments, I will sit down and wait to hear from the minister of, I guess, either seniors or health, who may want to address what I've just brought up.

3:40

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

[Reverend Abbott in the chair]

**Ms DeLong:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I've been really interested in the changes that we've been making to make this House a more meaningful House of discourse and debate. So I'd like a little bit of clarification, if I possibly could, possibly from our House leader, on exactly what it is that we're doing right here.

Now, my understanding is that what we're discussing here is interim supply and that these are numbers that are being approved to be spent until the budget is approved. That's my understanding. So in other words, when we look at these numbers, we should be looking at these numbers to see: is this more than should be spent, essentially, to the end of the year? Is it more than what should be spent? All of the budget, the actual numbers, how all these dollars are going to be spent actually gets approved through the budget process.

You know, the points have been very well made about how we ought to be bringing the budget in on time. I don't think there's anybody in this House who would disagree with that, and I'm really glad that we have now put ourselves in a position where we have to come out with the budget in time. Essentially, I believe that we should be looking at these numbers to see if any of them are out of line. In other words, should we not be spending less? I mean, are any of these numbers more than should be spent before the end of the year? They are all going to have to be vetted through the budget process that is coming.

I look at all these numbers, and, hey, there isn't anything in here which is out of line, you know, so the only questions that I actually have are about the nonbudgetary disbursements. I believe that those things should be outlined by the ministers, so I'd like to find out from the Advanced Education and Technology minister about the nonbudgetary disbursement of \$27,900,000, and on page 7 the nonbudgetary disbursement to Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture of \$2,500,000.

Now, for the rest of the numbers, it seems to me that the question that we're trying to answer here is: are any of them out of line? If there is one of them that's out of line . . .

**An Hon. Member:** How do you know?

**Ms DeLong:** Okay. What should be spent in a year? If you look at what the current budget was for last year, you should be able to get a pretty good idea of what should be spent in each of these departments.

**The Acting Chair:** Hon. member, please direct your comments through the chair.

**Ms DeLong:** Thank you.

So in terms of clarification from the House leader, I'd very much

appreciate it if you could clarify whether or not all of these expenditures will still have to be vetted through the budgeting process.

Thank you.

**The Acting Chair:** Thank you very much.

The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to rise and participate in the discussion and respond to the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow. Of course, she's absolutely right: what we really are talking about is interim supply. We've had over the course of the years that I've been in this House a lot of discussion, a lot of rhetoric about whether or not budgets should be in on a timely basis and not require interim supply, but the other side of the equation is that our budget is probably the most important thing that we do. We ask Albertans for resources, and then we allocate those resources in a manner which is, hopefully, the most effective and efficient use of those resources to provide common good, and that bears scrutiny.

Of course, we have a scrutiny process that follows the budget, a Committee of Supply process that follows the budget that allows us to go into detail in each of the areas and do that scrutiny before voting supply. In fact, we've had some good discussions this year, which hopefully will come to some fruition now that we've tabled the House leaders' agreement, to be able to even expand that process and make it a very comprehensive ability, up to 75 hours as provided for in the agreement, not this year but in contemplation of future years' process, to actually have this Legislature hold the government to account for the money that it's asking from Albertans and how it's going to actually spend that money. That process takes time, shouldn't be rushed, should be done thoroughly.

Now, we did put in the House leaders' agreement that the budget would come down on a fixed date, basically the second week of the House. Traditionally our Legislature has met starting in February. I think it may have started in January some years. But to bring the budget in as early as possible in the session so that you can deal with budget prior to the beginning of the fiscal year is a prudent thing to do. With the House leaders' agreement this year, in terms of putting that together, one of the objectives that I had as House leader was to deal with that. Actually, that's one of the recommendations of the Parliamentary Association, that budgets should be in prior to the beginning of the fiscal year so that they can have a good analysis prior to the end of the fiscal year. That's something we all aim for, but that's not always doable, so the process of interim supply has been available for a long time to provide for supply so that bills can be paid, so that the staff of government working for the people of Alberta can be paid, so that the operation of government goes on.

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

We know that there is going to be some supply. The question is: are we using the supply in the right place? So the process of interim supply really, in my humble opinion, should be a very straightforward and almost cursory process. You know, we could go through the numbers and ask whether the Legislative Assembly needs \$19.8 million before the end of June or whether Health and Wellness needs \$3.7 billion before the end of June, but there's no real worthwhile analysis that goes into those numbers until the budget is actually tabled and you can actually go through the program spending and say: are we doing the things that we ought to be doing? Are we achieving the outcomes that we ought to be achieving? Is the money being placed in the right place? So as the Member for Lethbridge-East was suggesting, it's not sort of a fairy godmother or your

wildest dreams come true, that somebody will write you a cheque before you've justified the value for it, not at all.

We all know – at least I assume we all know – that the hospitals remain open, that the schools remain open, that the people who work for the Department of Environment will continue to work for the Department of Environment, that those in Sustainable Resource Development will continue to be in Sustainable Resource Development. Most of them will be there, and that process will continue. This ship of state, this governance process continues, and it's necessary to continue to make the payments and to continue to pay the people. That's what interim supply is.

As the Member for Lethbridge-East is talking about her dreams, in my wildest dreams this would be a fairly perfunctory process. We accord it two days in Committee of Supply because it's \$10 billion, but really it would be great to have an understanding among all parties – and we may have it; I don't remember whether we actually got it in the agreement or not; I'll have to go back and check – that if in fact the budget is tabled in the second week of February and the process of examining the budget for 75 hours takes us past March 31, we should just adjourn Committee of Supply for one day and pass the interim appropriation bill in one day so that we can continue to pay the bills and then get on with the intense scrutiny of the budget that should happen in Committee of Supply. So in my wildest dreams everybody would sit down right now and we'd vote this and get on with continuing to debate the Speech from the Throne, get on with some of the 20 bills that are now on the table with the House, some of the other government business that can happen. That would be the prudent way to deal with this.

I hope that's answered your questions comprehensively.

3:50

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

**Mr. Bonko:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to the minister for somewhat of an explanation there. Taxpayers – and I consider myself a taxpayer as well as a parliamentarian as I'm here – are supposed to be able to ask those particular questions. We're talking about just being able to get us to the next projected budget. We've got Education, just looking at an example here: \$1.2 billion. That's huge money. We realize the day-to-day operations of the government have to continue to function. We can't run out of money, so we're just going to go on the interim. But the questions in particular instances are one line for expense and equipment/inventory purchases.

Well, again, this is what you were talking about: dreams or fairy tales – if there were a little more specifics there. I know that's going to come when the budget comes out, but in the meantime trust us on blind faith that we're putting the money in the appropriate areas, saying that it's going to be spent properly, and we'll have our ability and our chance to debate that when the time comes in the next 30 days. That's fair and fine, but go to your home life and ask that. Someone comes to you – a neighbour, your spouse, or even your kids – and says: "You know what? I need \$3,000. Trust me, I'll tell you what it's about in about a month." Are you going to be so willing to hand over \$3,000? We're talking \$10 billion here.

**An Hon. Member:** Take it out of their allowance.

**Mr. Bonko:** Take it out of their next allowance. That's right, yes. But in this case that's a large allowance. We're talking \$10 billion. Like I said, most people can't fathom that amount. We're talking about getting us through the next month. The overall budget I believe is about \$30 billion, so we're already asking for one-third of

it here at this point in time to get us through the next bit. Are we borrowing in advance of it, or is the money already spent and we're going to pay it back later? I don't know. But these are some of the questions that people could ask us.

I'm hoping that some of the monies that are to be allocated or directed would address some of the specifics that were mentioned. I mean, home care. I have a number of seniors in my particular area, and home care is, in fact, a top priority as well as housing. But for home care, just to be able to find space, to be able to find qualified people to be there, not just month-to-month but almost to guarantee it for a year because the quality does slip when you have a different person trying to learn the ropes.

We're talking about people in care, and I don't care how you describe "in care." When you're in there and someone else is looking after you, you're in care. Let's not mince words about it. We already know and can exactly describe what home care and in care mean. These are our most vulnerable people. Whether they be seniors or assisted living or completely dependent upon the aides to be able to bring them their meals and their pills, to be able to do everything for them: that's in care.

That area in itself is slumping because the industry, the occupation doesn't pay enough. It's very appreciated work. I know from when my grandparents were in there, that people were taking care of them, but there are not enough people that do take that and don't take the pay over it. They have to be compensated paywise because goodwill doesn't put food on the table and pay the rent. It's the pay. Some people do it because they enjoy working with seniors. They enjoy being in there, and they're very compassionate people. My hat is off to those types of people that do it day in and day out. In some cases it is a depressing place to be working.

Seniors' homes are another one. There are not a lot of younger people going in. It's sometimes described as a nowhere job because that's as good as it gets: serving and waiting and watching. We need to be able to pay people properly for that and at least, you know, bring the homes up to standard because when you walk into some of them, they look bloody awful. They really, really do. They look terrible. It's depressing in there: the lighting, the basements, even just the care. Even last year we were talking about people only being bathed once a week. That's disgraceful.

Let's go on to schooling, which seems to be a big topic. We're not even going to talk about the strike which is going on; I think it's day 18 or day 19. We talk about P3s to meet the inventory that's growing out there. I know that school boards would jump at the chance in some cases to take a P3 over no school at all. I know they'd be forced to take a P3 because their constituents would go absolutely ballistic if they had an opportunity to put a school in an area where kids are normally being bussed an hour and a half to two hours. Instead of being bussed, they could in fact walk to school. After 20 years of bussing you're left with absolutely nothing. We talk about the environment: it's pollution in the environment. But if we take the amount of money that we pay for bussing, put it into the school, we can maybe justify it. Could we justify it through a P3? I don't think so. But, again, as an elected board, how do you have that opportunity to discuss that? It's a real tough balancing act, especially when you're elected on that particular piece and are coming up to elections right away.

Schools and municipalities. It all sounds great. They all want the same thing. They want the infrastructure, but they don't want to pay for years and years, 30 years, in fact, to pay it off. They'd like to be able to manage it. I mean, we talk about us being the richest province, the hub, the engine, the oil that drives the economy not only in Alberta but in all of Canada, and we're talking about P3s, borrowing so that we can pay off other things later. You've got to kind of wonder about that. I think that if anyone had a clear

conscience on that, they'd want to pay it off as we go along. It would be nice if we could do that and then continue to go along knowing that we don't owe a bill at the end of the day for that particular piece.

Like I said, schooling is going to continue to be a tough one. We've got negotiations coming up. There are going to be more and more pressures on school boards to be able to meet the class size initiative and some of that. We talked about the Learning Commission. We've got a huge piece that we're going to be faced with.

Environment is another one. I mean, we've got \$40,600,000. Environment, in fact, looks like almost one of the smaller pieces. We've got huge, huge requests on environment. I don't know how we're going to be able to meet all the demand, the public backlash that we've got when we don't, as it looks here, put nearly enough money into it. The environment is, you know, probably one of the more precious things that we're going to be talking about – the land and the water and the air – over the next four to five years till we get our act together, finally, on it.

These are just a couple of specifics that I wanted to talk about. We've got, like I said, \$10 billion, and I'm hoping that in fact the budget does reflect what the ministers as well as the MLAs as well as the Premier have heard over the course of the last year from the time that the last budget was tabled. In my day-to-day discussions and my travels out in the rural areas and the towns and the municipalities we certainly hear a lot – and I'm sure you hear a lot – but quite often I don't hear a number of the government members speaking up on some of the specifics that they hear. They may do it inside their own caucus, but right here at the table I don't hear it nearly enough. That's what I think constituents want to hear: people standing up regardless of what side of the House you're on, to know that you're talking for Albertans. When Albertans see a request for money in a one-line item, they become suspicious.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

**The Chair:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I very much appreciate the Committee of Supply and the opportunities to ask questions for which, hopefully, answers can be provided, questions such as: how much debt – P3, private, for-profit debt – is the Minister of Education willing to load onto the backs of Alberta taxpayers, or how deep does the minister of infrastructure believe Albertans' pockets are, who will be forced to pay for the 30-year P3 mortgage debt that he's proposing? These are extremely important questions, and taxpayers are going to be asking them. Possibly we should be having the opportunities at the next election for this question to be asked of the taxpayers directly: do you or do you not favour going back into debt?

When it comes to education, my esteemed colleague from Edmonton-Decore has a professional background as a former trustee. He knows that of which he speaks. Having myself been a teacher for 34 years, 21 in the Calgary-Varsity constituency that I represent, I believe my concerns are validated based on my past experience.

I notice that \$1,200,000,000 has been set aside for education. I don't know for what period that money is allocated. I do know that in Calgary, with regard to the bussing that's been brought up lately, children of the Calgary separate and Calgary public boards spend 100,000 kilometres per day on school buses. This is not healthy for the children. It's not healthy for the environment. Yet with the model that we currently have in terms of the floor utilization space, this government forces school boards to close community schools, which does not permit the neighbourhoods to rejuvenate and, in fact, through school closures forces more kids onto the buses.

4:00

So not only are inner-city schools being closed, such as my experience at my first school, Jerry Potts, but the children from Jerry Potts and the Calgary Varsity Acres school now have to be transported across Shaganappi Trail, a very dangerous road, to go to Marion Carson. Instead of eliminating the busing problem, we're compounding it. I'm hoping that at some point this government will realize that instead of spending money on gasoline and buses, building schools is important.

With regard to Environment, \$40,600,000. I welcome an increased expenditure on the Ministry of Environment because right now it's expected to do a yeoman's job, which it's incapable of doing because its budget is barely a half a per cent of general revenue. Hopefully some of this \$40 million that's being spent in the next little while will go to mapping aquifers. Unless you know what you've got, how can you protect it?

With regard to Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture barely 4 per cent of Alberta's land is set aside for parks and protected areas, and that "protected areas" needs to come with quotation marks. Look at the intrusion into the Rumsey natural area. Look at what's happening in Medicine Hat on the army base in terms of the failure to reclaim the land after so much drilling. There are so many concerns.

Municipal Affairs and Housing. My esteemed colleague from Calgary-Currie this afternoon asked in question period whether there was any interim process or help for renters, quite a number of them being fixed-income seniors, whose rents are doubling, tripling, whether it's a 41 per cent increase at the Holy Cross Manor, whether it's a 400 per cent increase in the case of people living in apartments in Calgary that recently got that announcement. If \$234 million is going toward assisting those people with some form of rent subsidy, especially, as I say, the fixed-income seniors or those on AISH, who are not supposed to be spending more than 30 per cent of their income on shelter – the reality is, of course, that they're spending considerably more – if any of this money is going to develop programs that are going to help them to pay their rent and not find themselves out on the street and adding to our ever-growing number of homeless individuals, then I would suggest that that money could probably be very well spent.

With regard to parks and protected areas, any investment in parks and protected areas that deals with the crumbling infrastructure that parks are currently experiencing, any expenditure on parks that takes it past the 4 per cent level – for example, the idea of using that money to establish the Andy Russell I'tai Sah Kòp wilderness park of approximately 1,400 square kilometres – would be a wonderful expenditure that I and many recreational enthusiasts would very much support.

Again, we've got this one line item we do not know anything about under Sustainable Resource Development, \$172,600,000. For what? Hopefully, as with the parks and protected areas, that's going to be the hiring of more resource people to monitor what is happening in sustainable resources. Maybe they'll finally have somebody sitting in a truck by Cataract Creek park monitoring the logging trucks that are not supposed to be travelling down the road at the same time as campers are trying to access that same road. That would be a terrific expenditure; likewise, having conservation officers who didn't have to patrol an area of close to 200 square kilometres by themselves at all hours of the day and night so that they could actually get into the campgrounds and educate the campers on the natural beauty of the area. That would be money well spent.

Realizing that there a number of individuals who wish to work on

their Alberta throne speeches and have an opportunity to present, I would call for the question at this point.

**The Chair:** Are there any others that wish to participate in the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

**Mr. R. Miller:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I would like to just add a little bit to my comments from earlier this afternoon in terms of the debate on interim supply and, in particular, two points that I would like to make. I was just having a really friendly conversation with the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation about my dream of promoting a high-speed rail link between Edmonton and Calgary.

Members of the House might remember that last year there was a motion from an opposition member which would have seen the Assembly urging the government to investigate and develop a full electric, high-speed rail link between Edmonton, Red Deer, and Calgary. Unfortunately, that motion was voted down by this Assembly, but in reviewing the *Hansard* from the debate that evening, Mr. Chairman, there was tremendous support from all members of the House to the idea of at least securing a greenfield right-of-way for future development of that train. I know, based on the conversation that we had earlier this afternoon with the President of the Treasury Board – and others have commented as well – that we're not going to see details of the dollars that are being asked for today until a budget is announced on the 19th of April.

I would implore the members opposite, the government and particularly cabinet, to look very seriously at allocating money for the securing of a greenfield right-of-way for that high-speed train between Edmonton, Red Deer, and Calgary as an initial step toward the eventual development of that train.

The other thing that I did want to touch on, Mr. Chairman, was the unfunded teachers' pension liability. I was reviewing *Hansard* and the debate that took place yesterday on supplementary supply estimates, and I noted that the government has put \$40 million toward paying the government's portion of the unfunded liability for the management employees' pension plan. Of course, I am supportive of any effort to pay down those unfunded liabilities on all of the plans for which there are unfunded liabilities because I do believe that it will ultimately result in a better deal for the taxpayers if we have money to pay down those unfunded liabilities.

Today we should be doing that rather than paying them out over a number of years, but of course, Mr. Chairman – I'm sure you can guess where this is going – the teachers' unfunded pension liability, in particular, is sitting at nearly \$7 billion as we speak today and, as has been referenced in this House many times, will cost Alberta taxpayers somewhere in the order of \$45 billion over the lifespan of the agreement to pay it down. It is, quite frankly, just not acceptable, given the current economic reality, that we would expose Alberta taxpayers to those sorts of payments over 50-some years.

It's so bad, in fact, Mr. Chairman, that a young person born today who becomes a schoolteacher in 22 years will pay for that agreement for their entire working career as a teacher. That's how bad an agreement that is. I understand that when it was crafted in 1992, given the economic reality at that time, it was considered to be a fair agreement for government, teachers, and taxpayers, but everybody in this House will recognize that things have changed a lot since 1992.

4:10

We're certainly in a much different economic reality today than we were in in 1992. As a result I think it's time that we looked very seriously from a fiscal responsibility point of view at paying down

a portion of that unfunded liability for the teachers' pension plan. So my plea, as well, would be to the cabinet members and, particularly, the Finance minister as he's drafting his budget and to the Education minister to make sure that there is some redress for that pension plan in the upcoming budget and whether or not a portion of the money that's being requested today for the Education department is going to cover that or not. We don't know. It's looking like \$1.2 billion is in the interim supply. Whether or not any of that is going to go towards the unfunded teachers' pension liability, we don't know, but it is my hope that, as I said, from a fiscal responsibility point of view there will be some effort made to address that situation, as there was yesterday for the management employees' pension plan.

Mr. Chairman, with those comments I'd be happy to hear a response from either the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation in regard to securing the right-of-way for a high-speed train between Edmonton, Red Deer, and Calgary or from the Education or Finance ministers in terms of perhaps having some relief for the unfunded portion of the teachers' pension liability.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

**The Chair:** Are there others?

**Mr. Martin:** Mr. Chairman, the interim supply bill will have the same debate probably later dealing with the budget. But I want to say – we can't tell a lot about the budget from the interim supply – that if this is not a bold budget, as I said earlier on in question period, things are in many areas going to get worse before they are going to get better.

As people are aware – and I'm thankful to the government – there's an all-party task force on housing. Obviously I can't predict where that's going to go because we'll be working on it again tomorrow. But the stories that we heard out there – and it doesn't matter. What surprised me is that I knew of the problems, you know, dealing with rising rents and the homeless in Edmonton and Calgary, and you heard about it in Fort McMurray and you heard about it in Grande Prairie. What I found is that it's pretty well true throughout the whole province that there are virtually no vacancy rates anywhere in this particular province.

Now, it's one thing to sort of brag about growth – I call it economy on steroids – but if you're going to push the development as fast as we have in terms of the budgeting with the interim supplies here, if you're going to keep pushing this development as fast as we are, then you can't do it on the cheap. There has to be the backup, Mr. Chairman, for the needed social and physical infrastructure, and we can't keep up. I mean, when we do something here, as the minister of health did with the doctors yesterday, then the problem is going to be more severe even when you put that amount of money in at that particular time.

It doesn't matter what we're talking about: infrastructure, roads, health care, housing, education, you name it. One of the stories that we heard very dramatically from this task force, Mr. Chairman, and the public hearings was the people that are on fixed incomes, the desperation that they're facing. You know, their rents are going up, and certainly when you're on AISH or Alberta Works or the rest of it, it's not going up.

We have a whole new group of homeless out there: people that actually have jobs and families. Not that we shouldn't have been concerned about the permanent homeless out there before – we have to do something about them – but we have a whole new group out there. We estimate there are 10,000 people in this province that are homeless, and we're saying that we're not going to put the brakes to any future development. Well, the Alberta advantage is becoming a major disadvantage for most Albertans. Unless you're in the oil

industry or have some high paying job, it's becoming very difficult.

The interim supply, Mr. Chairman, will get us through to the budget, which I think is on the 19th of April, if I'm correct about that. But I will be really looking at this budget to see if it matches the difficulties that Albertans are facing right now. The interim supply bill obviously gives us some direction but not really a real idea about the serious problems that are facing Albertans. I suggest to you that if we don't begin in this budget year, starting with this interim supply, to deal with the very, very serious issues that are occurring, then we will have failed many Albertans.

I know what we were told with the housing task force, Mr. Chairman. We were told that there are great expectations of us to present a bold report. We'll see where that goes. Obviously we don't know at this point. I would also say that there are bold expectations on this government to do something in a very serious manner to deal with these problems. They'll say: okay, the interim supply will get us through till after the 19th, and we'll debate that particular bill. But if that budget doesn't recognize the very serious situation that we're facing in this province, I'd suggest that there are going to be a lot of angry people out there, and we better recognize that that's the case. So I thought that while we had a few minutes, I could begin to set the stage for the needed debate that has to be held in this Assembly. We'll get through the interim supply, and we'll look for the real budget and the real debate after that.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

**The Chair:** Are there others?

Seeing none, I would call on the Government House Leader to move that the committee now rise and report progress.

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I move that the Committee of Supply rise and report progress and beg leave to sit again.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

**Rev. Abbott:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions relating to the 2007-2008 interim supply estimates, reports progress, and requests leave to sit again.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Does the Assembly concur with the report?

**Hon. Members:** Agreed.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Opposed? So ordered.

head: **Consideration of His Honour  
the Lieutenant Governor's Speech**

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

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

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

[Adjourned debate March 13: Ms Blakeman]



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

4:20

**Rev. Abbott:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured and privileged to rise today to respond to the Speech from the Throne. It was, as always, wonderful to have our Lieutenant Governor in this Assembly last Wednesday to read the throne speech. I always admire the dignity and humour that he brings to every event.

Before I address the throne speech, I would like to first congratulate our new Premier and sincerely thank him for all the hard work he is doing on behalf of all Albertans. I know that the residents of Drayton Valley-Calmar are very pleased with our new Premier, and we are blessed to have a man of his character and vision, a decent, honest, humble, and wise man, leading our province in these prosperous but challenging times.

Alberta's new Premier's character and vision are reflected in the Speech from the Throne. It comes as no surprise that a man of vision has offered a visionary throne speech. Mr. Speaker, there is too much at stake at present and in the future for us to rest on our laurels now, enjoying our prosperity. That is why vision is essential. Only by seeing where we can go will we be able to enact the plan that will take us there.

We are fortunate to enjoy so much prosperity in Alberta that it is easy to be blinded by it. Sometimes we forget just how fortunate we are, but we need only ask one of the immigrants who arrive in our province every day why they have come to Alberta. "Because it's prosperous," they will say. "I want the opportunity to make my dreams come true, and I want my children to make their even bigger dreams come true too."

The vision, then, is clear: for Alberta to continue to prosper, offering a higher standard of living and greater opportunities for all of us. We must maximize our prosperity by offering a clean environment, a safe place to live in a vibrant community, good health care that is there when we need it, and world-class schools for our children. These are just a few of the ways our government can turn our current prosperity into further opportunity and even further prosperity.

I am pleased to say that the five priorities set out by our new Premier and this government are exactly the plan that Alberta needs to make this happen. Many school teachers have imparted to their students the wisdom that if you fail to plan, you plan to fail. Mr. Speaker, this government is not going to fail. With this Speech from the Throne our Premier has laid out exactly what we want to achieve and how we are going to achieve it.

This Speech from the Throne is about good government at the most fundamental level. Good government is what Albertans demand because it is exactly what Albertans need. The many services that Albertans enjoy will operate efficiently and productively only if the government that oversees them operates efficiently and productively.

Mr. Speaker, I cannot tell you how pleased I was to hear the Speech from the Throne emphasize transparency, openness, and accountability not just as a priority but as the number one priority. Albertans work very hard to make an honest living, and now their government is renewing its commitment to do the same. By doing all that we can to ensure that taxpayers' money is well spent and that the government operates with the highest levels of integrity, we in turn ensure that the best possible decisions are made. Maximizing our prosperity requires, first and foremost, a government that citizens respect and trust.

I'm also pleased that in the midst of our current prosperity the government is taking a hard-nosed, pragmatic look at the difficulties

which that prosperity can cause. Rapid economic growth has done wonders for our province, Mr. Speaker, but we must take decisive action to manage the pressures of this growth. In fact, I think that's our number one priority. I know that transparency and openness and honesty is what we are focusing on, but probably the largest portion would be managing the growth.

Well before the Speech from the Throne this new government established the Alberta Affordable Housing Task Force to study ways that homelessness and unaffordable housing can be eradicated. It's only a matter of days before this task force makes its eagerly awaited report. We will address this issue in the same way that we are addressing every issue: with initiative, with resolve, with innovative ideas, and especially with a drive to do what is right for all Albertans. Mr. Speaker, Drayton Valley alone has a list of over 80 families looking for affordable housing solutions. I believe that this new Premier and this government will help to accomplish this goal.

The Speech from the Throne has also committed this new government to improving how our province's labour needs are met. Whether you're an entrepreneur in need of good employees, a factory owner in need of skilled people, or a software maker looking for the talent to produce the next big thing, our government will do everything it can to make sure you have the people you need to grow your business.

Now, obviously this is welcome news to the constituency of Drayton Valley-Calmar, where you'll see help wanted signs everywhere, Mr. Speaker. But having the workers we need is only one part of our strategy to manage growth pressures. We must ensure that those workers can get to their jobs on efficient, safe, well-maintained roads, that their children can learn in clean, welcoming, and modern schools and universities, and that every Albertan has access to the best health care possible in world-class hospitals. Doing this while our province undergoes such growth is a task not to be taken lightly. This government is clearly up to the task of addressing our infrastructure needs while getting the most value possible from each and every tax dollar.

The residents of Drayton Valley-Calmar look forward to someday receiving the good news that a new highway 22 bridge over the North Saskatchewan River will be built. I hope that the minister of infrastructure is listening; I'm sure he is. Likewise, the families of Thorsby and area anticipate the funding for their new elementary school. These along with the need for top-up funding for H.W. Pickup and Holy Trinity Academy in Drayton Valley are just a few of the growth pressures that we hope to meet during this mandate.

Mr. Speaker, there is one issue that has received a remarkable amount of public attention recently. That issue is, of course, climate change. Well, I'm proud to have been part of a government, this government, that led the way in addressing this issue. Back in 2004, before any other government in Canada had acted, this government passed legislation with a greenhouse gas emissions action plan. That action plan is an excellent start, one that we will continue to implement and which we will build on this fall with a new plan. The Speech from the Throne commits the government to continuing our record of leadership on this issue. I look forward to a productive and lively discussion between citizens, business, and government on how we can do more to reduce the intensity of our greenhouse gas emissions.

In a similar way, since 2003 we've had North America's most comprehensive water management plan; that is, the Water for Life strategy. Now, like our climate change action plan, it has served Albertans well, preserving our natural spaces while enabling unprecedented economic growth. As the Lieutenant Governor noted in his speech last Wednesday, this government will consult Alber-

tans on how we can improve this strategy and prepare recommendations for the end of the year. By being proactive, by anticipating demands, and by ensuring that our plans measure up to Albertans' expectations, our natural spaces and our economy will continue to prosper.

Much of the know-how that makes our Water for Life strategy and our climate change action plan possible comes from our postsecondary education system. By ensuring that our universities, colleges, and technical institutes all have the resources they need to deliver world-class instruction, we can build on our record of environmental leadership. The development of the oil sands that is a big part of our current prosperity would not have been possible had the government of Alberta not had the foresight to invest in Alberta's scientists and engineers. Today further investment will help us develop more efficient processes that result in more energy at cheaper prices and with fewer environmental effects, truly a win-win for everyone.

We can also build on our record of leadership in many other kinds of innovation. From medical research that has positively affected millions of lives world-wide to the development of state of the art nanotechnology that has the potential to help millions more, our innovations are helping to build the value-added, diversified, export-driven economy that the future demands. Through the Campus Alberta approach we ensure that every Albertan has the opportunity to pursue their education no matter where they are or what they wish to study. Making education available to everyone is just another one of the ways that the government of Alberta is improving Albertans' quality of life.

Underlying our postsecondary system is our K to 12 education system, which is preparing our children to be tomorrow's citizens. Countless tests and surveys have shown what Albertans have known for a long time: a person would have to travel far and wide to find a school system as good as ours. Our students boast some of the best scores in the world in reading, science, and problem solving. As a former school trustee, Mr. Speaker, I support the government's approach of working with every stakeholder – teachers, parents, students, and administrators – to make our schools even better.

**4:30**

While our schools are essential parts of our communities, there is much more that can be done to build our province. Albertans are famous for their hard work, and we like to work hard even when we're not at work. What am I talking about? Well, volunteers. Volunteers contribute thousands of hours and thousands of dollars every year to help their fellow citizens. In my time as senior pastor of the Faith Evangelical Covenant Church in Breton, Alberta, I witnessed hundreds of simple acts of kindness that made all the difference in someone's life.

Thus, I was ecstatic that the Speech from the Throne promises the creation of a community spirit program for charitable giving. This program will support increases for private charitable donations through tax credits and offer matching grants to eligible donations to Alberta charities. This is an excellent way to turn the prosperity of individual Albertans into more opportunities for everyone. By offering these incentives for charitable donations, not only can we encourage more donations in the first place, but we can multiply the beneficial effects these donations will have.

A prosperous society, Mr. Speaker, must be a peaceful society. To have opportunity means nothing when the fruits of that opportunity might disappear unjustly. By setting as a priority the provision of safe and secure communities, the government of Alberta has reaffirmed that every person be able to live a life of dignity and respect, free from fear and crime. My constituency, like many others in rural Alberta, needs more RCMP. We need more special

constables to patrol our communities and to catch the bad guys. We must implement the recommendations of the crystal meth task force to curb the negative effects of this awful drug.

Mr. Speaker, the final priority that the Premier has set out for this government is to build a stronger Alberta. This requires us to ask ourselves what we don't do so well and what we need to improve on, a process that this government has already started with this Speech from the Throne. It also requires us to take a hard look at what we do well and ask ourselves how we can do that better.

We have so much energy in Alberta that we need a comprehensive energy strategy to ensure that all of those resources are developed in a sustainable, environmentally responsible way. Renewable energy will be included in this strategy, and this Speech from the Throne makes it clear that this government is committed to environmentally sound development. The fruits of developing all this energy are coming into our hands today. Few states in history have enjoyed as much wealth as Alberta presently has. By effectively managing the resources that we are blessed to have today, we will ensure that all of Alberta's future needs are met.

Mr. Speaker, when I reflect on this Speech from the Throne, I ask myself this question: if some of the first pioneers who settled in my constituency, Drayton Valley-Calmar, were to reappear today, what would they say? I think they would say: "You have done well in providing your children with an education that is among the best in the world. You have done well in nurturing a bountiful economy that gives everyone the opportunity to make something of themselves." We've done well. There's no doubt about that. Now we must develop that prosperity and opportunity into renewed prosperity and opportunity.

This Speech from the Throne marks the turning over of a new leaf to new ideas, new plans, and a new style of government. I'm proud to serve the people of Drayton Valley-Calmar in this government under our new Premier, and, Mr. Speaker, I encourage all fellow parliamentarians to serve with me.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for questions and comments.

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a privilege to stand to represent my Calgary-Varsity constituents through my response to the Speech from the Throne.

As a result of my past experience as a public school teacher for 34 years with the Calgary board of education, I view the Speech from the Throne as a government homework project or assignment. Regardless of whether I was teaching a grade 1 or a grade 12 class, I would work collaboratively with my students to set both short-term and long-term objectives. Together we would arrive at realistic timelines for the completion of various portions of the assignment. We would discuss how the assignment would be evaluated based on mutually conceived and agreed-upon criteria. We would brainstorm the types of resources needed to successfully complete the assignment. Through mutual support and feedback we achieved the objectives we had set out.

Wednesday, March 7th's Speech from the Throne contained none of the essential elements of a successful assignment. It was vague and evasive, without clearly defined objectives, timelines, or evaluative processes. If you don't know where you're headed, how will you know when you've arrived?

In evaluating and analyzing the Speech from the Throne, I'm going to use a similar format to that employed by the hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition in the researching and writing of his

latest highly acclaimed book, *Democracy Derailed*. In *Democracy Derailed* the MLA for Edmonton-Riverview first highlights the Conservative government's failure, followed by a proposed Alberta Liberal government solution. In the opening paragraphs of the throne speech we are informed that "our current prosperity is a result of foresight by Albertans whose values we honour, values such as fiscal vigilance, community spirit, and self-reliance." Obviously there is a demonstrably great divide between what the government claims to honour and what it actually practises.

Although the government's front-row seating plan has changed, there is no evidence either suggested in this throne speech or in recent government practice that fiscal vigilance will become its priority in the near future. Rather, there is mounting evidence that would indicate the opposite. These are the same people who for years running were unable to predict to the nearest \$3 billion the surplus. Nor were they able to manage their nonrenewable, resource-fuelled, gambling-subsidized surpluses. Year after year quarterly budgets meant nothing as these members dipped into and spent 92 per cent of successive multibillion dollar surpluses rather than saving for the future.

The government's dependency on and addiction to nonrenewable resource revenue has increased despite its diversification lip service. Rather than being fiscally prudent, building up the heritage savings trust fund and creating an infrastructure fund, as our Liberal caucus nonrenewable resource fiscal plan has suggested, the government has instead trumpeted P3 – private, for-profit, at public expense – plans as the solution to the infrastructure deficit in the province.

The new Alberta government doublespeak suggests that there is good debt and bad debt. As a provincial Liberal who believes in a pay-as-you-go approach while saving for the future, I fail to see the Tory logic of going back into debt. With a \$7 billion third-quarter surplus and \$6 billion and change in each of the sustainability and capital funds for a combined total approaching \$20 billion, prudent fiscal management must be exercised to provide sustainability for future generations.

Community spirit and self-reliance in and of themselves are admirable qualities. I would suggest, however, that Albertans have been stretched to their limits, volunteering more hours and more money than ever before. This is evidenced by studies showing families having ever less time to spend together and being more stressed than ever. Nonprofit agencies and in-home family caregivers, whether for children, seniors, the ill, or the disabled, need to know that their government will be there to help them when they need help.

Circumstances beyond an individual's control, such as a lack of affordable housing, the shortage of good child care, difficulties finding care for aged parents or disabled dependants, inadequate public transportation, and so on, that threaten ultimate safety and health, lead to fear, stress, and a loss of productivity, to say nothing of quality of life. As an Alberta Liberal I recognize that supporting Albertans through difficult times leads to long-term gains in many, many ways. It is also far less expensive in the long term, particularly in terms of physical and mental health costs.

The misuse of language is prevalent throughout the Speech from the Throne. They "made wise choices, including the bold and often difficult decisions made during the past decade." This is an attempt by the Premier's public affairs propaganda bureau to rewrite history. There was nothing bold or difficult in the decision that our past Premier made and which was supported without question by our new Premier and most of his current cabinet and backbenchers.

The speed at which this Conservative government paid off its accumulated \$23 billion debt on the backs of Alberta taxpayers couldn't be described as either bold or difficult. Rather, it was

personally driven and traumatic. The government copied the deplorable actions of New Zealand's Finance Minister Sir Roger Douglas of: don't blink, cut quick, cut deep, and damn the consequences. The disastrous repercussions of that solitary focus, such as the loss of half of Calgary's hospitals and the failure to maintain or replace much-needed schools, roads, and water treatment plants to name just a few, continue to be felt on a daily basis through Alberta with no apparent end or government plan in sight, certainly not in this throne speech.

#### 4:40

The throne speech, without actually providing a plan or a road map, at least acknowledges that we must plan ahead to ensure that the prosperity this province is enjoying today is secured for our children and grandchildren. As a proud grandfather of two grandsons, Kiran and Rohan Warrier, I have great concerns about the Alberta legacy that they will inherit unless a dramatic political change takes place. An Alberta Liberal government won't sell out future generations in favour of ad hoc immediate economic gratification.

An Alberta Liberal government will save and invest our current nonrenewable resource revenue to eliminate future dependence. Using today's figures, our increased investment in the heritage trust fund, which has remained stagnant over the past 15 years of Tory mismanagement, would rise to at least \$120 billion by 2020, producing the interest-generated equivalent of the total revenue received from the royalties of gas and oil production.

The drone from the throne offered questionable assurances to Albertans when it was stated that your new government will be open and accountable, fiscally responsible, and inclusive. Accountability has to start at the top. An Alberta Liberal government will give Albertans a real voice in deciding the future of a healthy democracy in Alberta.

As to the promise that the government will be inclusive, the private, behind-closed-doors attitude continues. The Affordable Housing Task Force met frequently behind closed doors. This travelling task force was in large part prompted by the previously released Liberal affordable housing plan, drafted after considerable input from open-to-the-public forums held across the province by our deputy leader and shadow minister for municipal affairs, the MLA for Calgary-Currie. In our plan immediate legislated relief would be provided for tenants being gouged by unscrupulous landlords taking advantage of the Alberta government's refusal to intervene in a highly inflated economy. The Premier's refusal to put on the brakes has seen a steadily increasing number of vulnerable Albertans get run over.

The much-touted flagship Bill 1, whereby the Alberta government finally acknowledges the need for a lobbyist registry, something which has been in place for a considerable length of time in other provinces and within the federal government, is a superficial facade. If the government initiates contact with a lobbyist, as was the case with Kelley Charlebois, the \$400,000 Nothing Written man, or the infamous Rod Love, no details of the business undertaken need to be recorded. As long as each of the contracts these men of no notes receives is under \$100,000, no bid is required. In other words, if the government comes courting, there's no reporting.

For those who do sign up to lobby the government, no details of their behind-closed-doors meetings will be publicly available, only their names and which minister they met with. This is a far cry from the transparency that opposition Liberals have been calling for. A transparency and accountability measure that a Liberal government will enact is whistle-blower protection legislation so that people who report government misdeeds will not risk losing their jobs, as was

the case with the Alberta Securities Commission and the inadequate government investigation of same.

Another democratic integrity initiative favoured by a provincial Liberal government but absent from the Premier's throne speech will be the establishment of a citizens' assembly to review the currently flawed first past the post election system, which rewarded the Conservatives with 63 seats although they had received the support of less than 25 per cent of eligible Alberta voters. Of those few engaged Albertans, less than 50 per cent, who took the time to cast their votes, the majority voted against the government. Engaging Albertans in the democratic process is one of the key planks in the Alberta Liberal platform. For that reason, during the spring session I will be introducing a motion to reduce the eligible voting age from 18 to 16 years old.

Under the heading Managing Growth Pressures, the government claims that it will craft a made-in-Alberta solution to labour needs. This statement flies in the face of today's Alberta workplace reality, which prevents thousands of unionized Alberta tradesmen from receiving jobs/wages that recognize their qualifications. This government, which cut the number of seats of postsecondary institutions, both academic and technical, has yet to devise a plan which will pay for the infrastructure or the instructors/professors necessary to train Albertans. Among the many Albertans who have been sidelined by the boom are the rapidly growing numbers of First Nations youth, who yearn to be a part of the solution.

Instead of fostering the talent that exists within this province and across Canada, this government has sought to circumvent Canadian citizenship rights by encouraging the exploitation of temporary foreign and frequently indentured workers. Refusing to implement first contract legislation while legitimizing division 8 contracting of highly questionable quasi-unions hiding behind the cover of the Christian Labour Association of Canada demonstrates the government's attempt to manipulate rather than facilitate the job market. How the Premier's Public Affairs Bureau, the 1984 equivalent of the ministry of truth, who authored this throne speech, has the audacity to claim that "the government of Alberta will continue to build on its solid record in environmental management with some of the most progressive legislation and action-based strategies in the country" is absolutely incredible.

This government and its rubber-stamping accomplice, the Energy and Utilities Board, which is 60 per cent funded by industry and 40 per cent by the government, have an atrocious record, whether one looks at land, water, or air. The EUB approves 98 per cent of the exploration/drilling applications it receives regardless of the sensitivity of the rapidly vanishing wilderness or encroaching urban sprawl encompassing existing well sites. On the southeastern slopes in the Whaleback along the Livingstone range, the special areas that the Nature Conservancy of Canada refer to as the last five miles, ranchers, environmentalists, recreational enthusiasts, and townspeople are fighting an uphill battle to preserve the water and land against a government-endorsed, nonrenewable resource extraction onslaught.

Environmental protection in this province is a travesty. The Ministry of Environment receives less than 1 per cent of revenue in a province whose government values immediate economic gratification over long-term sustainable growth. "Water for life" and "blue gold" have nice rhetorical rings when uttered, but if you don't back up the words with science, funded conservation, and protection, they become omissions, empty vessels of a government running on empty. It wasn't until my Calgary-Mountain View colleague, our Liberal shadow minister for environment, forced their hand that this government finally agreed to do minimal baseline water testing prior to drilling. The steadily growing tailing ponds surrounding the oil

sands north of Fort McMurray, the government-permitted drilling without reclamation damage to the Suffield range, the recently approved intrusions into the supposedly protected wilderness areas, including the Rumsey, and park areas for resource extraction, as well as clear-cutting and watersheds are an ongoing testament to the fact that in Alberta the one-trick pony of resource extraction trumps environmental concerns.

An Alberta Liberal government, without bringing our currently resource-based economy to a grinding halt, will set aside no go zones to conserve and protect habitat, wildlife, and water. It will work with industry to dramatically reduce both its ecological consumptive footprint and emissions output. Only in the most extreme circumstances, in which fighting the spread of mountain pine beetles does not qualify, would clear-cutting be permitted. A Liberal government will work with industry and regions to develop a land-use strategy drawing from the report that we released last year to prompt discussion.

I personally would like to see the same expectation placed on industry that is required on a golf course; i.e., you must replace the divot. Reclamation should be required to proceed at the same rate as extraction. Emissions wouldn't just be reduced in intensity, such as the proposal to reduce intensity by 12 per cent or face the paltry penance of \$15 a tonne for polluting. An Alberta Liberal government will begin immediately to work with industry to build the infrastructure to sequester emissions. Rather than rebates, we would offer retrofit subsidies to encourage better use of our nonrenewable resources.

From affordable housing to economic diversification balanced with environmental conservation and protection, Alberta Liberals have a vision and a plan. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Boutilier:** Well, my first response is: balderdash.

**An Hon. Member:** Well, that's clever.

4:50

**Mr. Boutilier:** Well, it is very good, and let me expand on that so that it's comprehended by the hon. member across the way as well.

Number one, in the province of Alberta, when it comes to Water for Life, we have more than rhetoric; we have action. Specifically, this province was the only government that came forth with our South Saskatchewan River basin study, that said that we will no longer allow withdrawals from the South Saskatchewan River basin. That seems to be forgotten by the Liberals and the New Democrats, and the reason is that they don't like promoting the good things that the government is doing. I accept that they're in opposition, but sometimes they may do themselves better by recognizing the good work because it reflects the values that Albertans have.

Consequently, we can listen to political rhetoric, but at the end of the day when we talk about Alberta leading, we talk about sequestration. We talk about a CO<sub>2</sub> pipeline, where we're going to be able to take the emission that is going into the air, and we're going to put it into the ground. We're going to pipe it into a pipeline that can be used for enhanced oil recovery. Ultimately, unlike perhaps what the opposition wants to do, we are not going to use water; we are going to use CO<sub>2</sub>. So my question to the hon. member is simply this: are you suggesting that you would prefer that we continue to use water and not use emissions that are going into the air? Presently, as you know, we are using water, and we are moving to CO<sub>2</sub> for enhanced oil recovery. Don't you agree that using CO<sub>2</sub> that's going into the air is a far better use of energy than water? Yes or no?

**Mr. Chase:** I agree that using CO<sub>2</sub> sequestered rather than water is

an obviously good idea, that this government has yet to implement, and I am looking forward to an Alberta Liberal government moving beyond the 12 per cent emissions intensity and capping emissions totally, working with industry to achieve real reduction inputs.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Boutilier:** Yes. Mr. Speaker, actually, one of the very important initiatives of this government – in fact, two years ago at the United Nations in Buenos Aires the Alberta government talked about renewables, they talked about alternative energies, and they talked about science and technology, that not only can Alberta be the energy capital of Canada, but we can become the environmental capital of North America because of the good work of Alberta industry and Alberta scientists working in partnership with our government. I have to ask the hon. member: don't you agree with that type of plan that this government is exercising?

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

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you very much. I have spoken to a number of professors at the University of Calgary who are connected with the ISEEE organization. They are working to achieve a cleaner environment, and I appreciate the work that they are doing. The problem is that we have to get past the talk. We know that we have research to sequester CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. North Dakota is sending its CO<sub>2</sub> to fields in Saskatchewan. We know through the research that scientists have done in Alberta that we have a tremendous amount of space left by the extraction of gas and oil to sequester these emissions.

What we need is action, which should have started some time ago, considering the science is now old, to get these pipelines built. We need to work with industry to see what responsibility both government and industry and, of course, the taxpayers who fund government initiatives have with regard to sequestering the emissions. We can talk about it today, but unless we start building those pipelines, whether it's to inject in place of water in order to get at the oil and the gas, which makes tremendous sense because we win twice – we get to receive more oil and gas, and we lose the CO<sub>2</sub>. It's a win-win circumstance. The science exists, but we need to get on with the building of that infrastructure. That's what a Liberal government would do. With research, with industry we'd get it done. We'd get it going. We'd get it going as soon as we're elected to do so.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The time has elapsed under Standing Order 29(2)(a).

I'd recognize the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

**Mr. Johnson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and respond to the Speech from the Throne delivered by His Honour the Lieutenant Governor. I want to thank him for delivering what I think is the right road map for Alberta's future.

I rise today, firstly, on behalf of the constituents of Wetaskiwin-Camrose, who will benefit from numerous aspects of the speech. I also rise as the chair of the Alberta Research Council and the vice-chair of the Alberta Science and Research Authority. We are very fortunate to live in exciting times. Amongst the provinces Alberta is in a leadership position when we consider our economic and fiscal position. Albertans have a range of opportunities when it comes to education, research and technology development, employment, business, and recreation. My constituents share in these opportuni-

ties. Wetaskiwin-Camrose is very fortunate to be the home of the Augustana campus of the University of Alberta, a renowned research university. The cities of Wetaskiwin and Camrose are business service centres for the highway 2 corridor and east-central Alberta. Between the arenas, ballparks, and trails, my constituents are active throughout the constituency and on the go.

My constituents and all Albertans recognize how fortunate they are, but I think they are very interested in preserving the opportunities they enjoy today for future generations. Maintaining this prosperity is not without challenges. It goes without saying that Alberta has a significant resource bounty, whether it's oil and gas, agriculture, or forests. That said, our conventional oil and gas reserves are in decline, and developing new sources, such as the oil sands and nonconventional gas, comes with significant challenges. Traditional agriculture, as previous generations understood it, is transforming rapidly, and our forest industry was faced with punitive tariffs and now must contend with the scourge of pine beetles.

Beyond those challenges Alberta is facing competition from rapidly growing economies, such as China and India. Our water supply must contend with the potential doubling of our population over the next 35 to 40 years along with the continued industrial growth. World energy demands may see the doubling or tripling of oil sands production.

Mr. Speaker, these may appear to be daunting challenges. The easy answer would be to have government halt development or control growth. However, I do not think that we should despair or recoil in the face of these challenges. Our government very clearly has decided against taking the easy way out and has outlined its plan to address Alberta's growth challenges in the Speech from the Throne by outlining five priorities for action: one, govern with integrity and transparency; two, manage growth pressures; three, improve Alberta's quality of life; four, build a stronger Alberta; and five, provide safe and secure communities.

Today I want to talk about issues surrounding three of those priorities: managing growth pressures, building a stronger Alberta, and improving Alberta's quality of life. These three issues deal most closely with the priorities outlined in the Speech from the Throne dealing with research and development as well as technology commercialization. Research and development are critical to advancing our knowledge about the world around us to advance beyond our current technologies and methods and techniques.

But it's more than developing new technologies. We have to foster commercialization of technology in order to generate further economic growth and create jobs to sustain our prosperity. As chair of the Alberta Research Council I feel that Alberta's research institutions are well placed to respond to the vision laid out in the Speech from the Throne by addressing the challenges of growth in a long-term and sustained manner. Specifically, ARC is supporting Alberta's growth and development by increasing and protecting the value Alberta derives from its resources, by helping large, medium, and small companies grow their business, and by building Alberta's global reputation as a place of excellence in research and innovation by leverage.

Now, to move these goals forward, ARC works closely with Alberta's research institutes, including the Alberta Energy Research Institute, the Alberta Agricultural Research Institute, the Alberta Forestry Research Institute, the Alberta Life Sciences Institute, and the Alberta ICT Institute, the Information and Communications Technology Institute. These institutes support the throne speech intention to focus on priority areas of research in energy and information and communication technology.

5:00

In addition, ARC participates in EnergyINet to provide Alberta-

based technology development in the energy sector. It also works with iCORE, Alberta ingenuity fund, the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research, Alberta's postsecondary institutions, and the National Institute for Nanotechnology to develop Alberta's innovative capacity. Research is labour intensive, and ARC is working to recruit and retain key scientists to bolster Alberta's ability in meeting these strategic challenges. I believe we are well supported by our postsecondary institutions in this regard. As well, part of attracting people into research and development is investing in state of the art applied research infrastructure. ARC is making this investment to ensure that Alberta's research agenda can be advanced.

With the right minds, ARC is able to leverage the investment it receives from the government of Alberta and deliver results in three areas of strategic importance to the province: number one, the bioeconomy; number two, greenhouse gas management and reduction; and number three, water utilization.

In terms of the bioeconomy, ARC is supporting the vision Albertans have to diversify their economy and build strong communities through the development of new value-added products. The main example is the development of the integrated manure utilization system, or IMUS, and most of you know that the pilot plant is out near Vegreville. IMUS currently converts animal by-products into biogas, which is converted into electricity or heat. The solid by-products are turned into natural biobased fertilizer, and water is reclaimed for irrigation. There are many untapped applications of IMUS, and I believe it can be used quite effectively by not only feedlots or large agricultural producers but by food processors and municipalities to handle waste products.

To support the thrust of a bioindustry in Alberta, it is noteworthy in the Speech from the Throne that an institute of agriculture, forestry, and environment will be established. I think there are many common areas for ARC and this institute to work together to find ways to support our agriculture and forestry industries for long-term economic sustainability.

A very popular topic right now is managing greenhouse gas emissions. Albertans understand the need to balance the economy and the environment. Our government recently tabled Bill 3, the Climate Change and Emissions Management Amendment Act, 2007. This amendment puts Alberta at the front of the pack, putting in place Canada's first legislative greenhouse gas emissions intensity reduction targets for large industrial emitters. Reaching this target will require innovative solutions for carbon capture, conversion, and storage – sometimes known as CCS – to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. ARC's Dr. Bill Gunter is an internationally recognized leader in carbon dioxide management and is working to find new technological solutions that can be put in place in Canada and become adopted around the world.

If we can manage CO<sub>2</sub> in a responsible way, Alberta will be able to get closer to the goal of developing zero-emission coal, as outlined in the Speech from the Throne. Effective management of carbon dioxide emissions will also justify the continued development of the oil sands and will greatly assist in enhancing recovery of oil and gas. I think it's important to illustrate the potential that exists in using carbon dioxide to enhance oil and gas recovery. Based on EUB data of discovered oil in place, at today's oil prices a 1 per cent increase in recovery would translate into revenues of \$35 billion over 15 to 20 years and would create new economic opportunities. Using natural gas as an example, if recovery could be improved by 15 per cent, it would result in over \$280 billion in additional revenues over a 15- to 20-year span. This could result in substantial benefit to Alberta and underlines the importance of innovation.

Recently ARC joined its counterparts in Quebec, Manitoba,

Saskatchewan to form I-CAN, Innoventures Canada. I-CAN integrated publicly supported research infrastructure and expertise from a number of provinces in a seamless system. This will help improve productivity and the performance of Canadian industry. One of I-CAN's first initiatives is working toward reducing Canada's carbon dioxide emissions by 100 million tonnes per annum by 2012. This is a positive action for Alberta, and I'm very pleased that ARC is engaged in this national initiative.

ARC is also taking water utilization very seriously because Albertans just expect a sustainable supply of good quality water today and in the future. One of ARC's responses to the challenges of growth is implementing ways to reduce industry's reliance on water by over 30 per cent of current requirements by 2030. This could be achieved through recycling of waste water, solvent use for in situ recovery, new carbon dioxide and water flooding techniques, and enhanced gas and oil recovery processes.

Of interest to the Westaskiwin-Camrose constituency is the long-term sustainability of the Battle River. To respond to not only the concerns of my constituents but of all Albertans, ARC will deliver a water quality assurance program to ensure a supply of safe drinking water in all areas of the province.

In all three areas – that is, the bioeconomy, carbon dioxide emissions, and water management – ARC is demonstrating leadership and ingenuity to find real solutions to supporting Alberta's future growth. Through research and innovation we can find the answers to developing our resources in an effective manner, and we can deal effectively with environmental concerns and climate change. We can preserve our water, and we can create new industries to ensure that Albertans can enjoy a prosperous future for generations to come. Our government's Speech from the Throne lays out this same intention, and I believe that ARC and all Albertans will work very hard to make the ambitious objectives in the Speech from the Throne a reality.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Standing Order 29(2)(a) again is available.

Seeing none, I recognize the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

**Ms Pastoor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to respond to the Speech from the Throne, and I rise today not only for my constituents of Lethbridge-East but for all of those constituents that require care in the province, those that may just need that short-term help but also those that will be in care for the rest of their lives. They deserve to be treated with dignity and respect.

The throne speech I thought had some certainly good intentions. I believe that it was a little bit vague. There was a vision, but again I think it was vague in perhaps not going in as much depth as I would like to have seen, but perhaps that's part of not quite getting this part of being totally transparent. There is a sentence that said, "Albertans have told their government that economic prosperity must not come at the expense of quality of life, and the government of Alberta is listening." It also goes on to say, "It will ensure that services, programs, and infrastructure are in place to maintain Albertans' high quality of life."

I totally agree that there are many, many people in this province with a very, very high quality of life; however, I believe that there are probably more with either no quality of life or certainly a quality of life that is disappearing. I think that we all will speak differently when we speak about quality of life. We will define it differently. Does that mean time for the family? I think my colleague already mentioned that there are 200 hours less that parents are spending with their children. I'm not sure that this is really healthy for our society. They either do not eat dinner together or very seldom, or

they actually eat fast food in front of a television, which I realize is a family choice, but often it's because they're in a hurry and they haven't had time to cook.

5:10

The other thing that is affecting those with the lower quality of life is what really can be defined as a living wage. Is it our responsibility? I think that that's a point for debate. Is it our responsibility to ensure that people can make a living wage, particularly those that work in the care industries? Should they have a house to live in? I believe that on this side of the House we do believe that everyone should have a roof over their head and certainly food on the table. I don't believe that we should be having to depend on food banks or soup kitchens in this province.

I really do believe that the real story from the Speech from the Throne is truly the budget because it's wonderful to have wonderful words and a great document that looks good, but unless you've got the budget and the dollars that are going to back up those words, then really all they are are empty promises.

One of the things that I have noticed that has happened – and I want to make sure that it's addressed – is, of course, my constant speaking of the fact that long-term care was deregulated in this province. Really, part of the reason behind that was to decrease the dollars that would come out of the health ministry to put towards long-term care. In fairness, certainly some people were placed in long-term care, where it was most inappropriate for them to be, when in fact the object is to help people maintain their independence for as long as possible.

It says, "Building the health workforce of the future will be a top priority." I would say that we are in a crisis now. I don't think we can wait for the future. I think we have to move. The information is there. The MLA task force draft for the standards and certainly my adjunct report is more than clear. The crisis is now. We have a crisis in staffing for human services, for PDD, for continuing care, for child care services not just in terms of child development but also the child care services where we have to take children under the provincial wing, in fact, to protect them. Just within the last short period of time children in Lethbridge have been taken into protection because their parents were busted in a grow operation.

The staffing to look after the homeless. Now, the staff that we require for the homeless are actually those that would give the support to help people move from homelessness to transition to actually becoming productive members of our society. Many of these people truly don't even know how to shop properly, how to spend their dollars and make them go as far as they can in terms of good, nutritious food. These are the support people that I'm talking about.

Staffing at food banks has now become an issue. One of the other places that we have a goodly portion of this particular segment that is supported by volunteers is faith-based service delivery. I really believe that this government has got to take a look, a very hard look, at supporting the faith-based service delivery people because they really work more for the cause than they do for the actual profit. They have many, many, many years of experience delivering these services, so I would like this government to take a look at these organizations before they would look at the ones that do it for profit.

We need well-paid and well-trained people, but more importantly we must respect and create a system that doesn't destroy the souls of the people that work in the care industry. They do the impossible job every day of delivering care for ever-increasing people in need with fewer and fewer people. People who work in the care industry know what they have to deliver to the people that they're responsible for and to. When they leave at the end of the day and can't say,

"I've done the job that I need to do, and Mrs. So-and-so or Mr. So-and-so or little Tommy was truly looked after to the best of my ability," then they go home and their souls are slowly but surely destroyed. They get burnout, and they leave the industry. We cannot afford that in this province.

When long-term care was deregulated, it was deregulated into two segments. One was housing, and one was care. So we have two ministries, probably with 19 different departments in between, actually looking after the same person.

The housing, of course, has now been divided into any number of categories. What I've always been asking for are clear definitions of what those categories are and how they actually can be applied directly across the province. We have what they call supportive living, that's divided into assisted living and designated assisted living. We've got lodges, enhanced lodges. We have home care. And all of these pertain to the housing side of it.

One of the other things that was mentioned was that the government will work to expand long-term care capacity. I think we have to be very clear that we're all speaking about the same thing. What is long-term care? What I always refer to is continuing care, which, of course, then includes the long-term care portion. Long-term care as we know it today usually includes people that have high medical needs, not just Aids to Daily Living care.

Most regions are trying to decrease the number of long-term care beds in their areas. In the end it's going to prove not to be a wise move because some people are being assessed improperly and put into the wrong living accommodations.

Families also must be directly involved with the assessment of where people are going to live. Some of the things that are happening in the province are that there is an assessment tool. People are assessed. They come down to the bottom and say: this is the kind of care you require; therefore, this is where you're going to live. I believe that that is very wrong. I am really looking for the words "continuing care," and let's work within that definition. The reason I'm looking for that is because that's what the Liberals would do.

I'd like to tell a little story trying to explain the deregulation of long-term care. We have grandma sitting in a room in housing. Housing supplies board and room. Grandma may need a little bit of help because she's had a stroke; she's right-handed and is paralyzed on the right side. So with a little bit of help from people, not necessarily medically trained or with the higher skills of a PCA, they can help her get dressed, go to the washroom, and take her down to the dining room. We now have her sitting at the dining room table ready to eat breakfast. The food is put in front of her, but who is going to feed her? We have now moved from housing into care. This is where it gets very confusing because it's the same person that is to be looked after, and we've got two different ministries responsible.

Another thing that I would like to address, that I didn't necessarily see in this, is that I believe it's very important to index AISH. The other thing that I would like to see is one-third of AISH income go towards their housing. We have people out there paying anywhere from 60 to 70 per cent of their very meagre income, and they truly do live in hovels.

I also agree that the Water for Life strategy is certainly a priority. I do know that our University of Lethbridge has some of the leading scientists working on this. It will become the oil of tomorrow, but I believe that tomorrow is here. In fact, I think it was yesterday. We really have to make the protection of our water a priority that we move on instantly. Yes, I realize that money is going forward, but I don't believe that it's going fast enough, and I don't think that the EUB is coming out with decisions that are timely or that truly have been looked at with a scientist's eye.

I hope that I see a change of heart, that economic policies that are imperative for our province and, certainly, for our tax base will be matched with a social policy overlay, and that the government will work with this side in a very co-operative manner, which has been certainly expressed by this Premier. I believe that it was President Franklin D. Roosevelt who said at one point in time – and I paraphrase – that the time for competition is over and the time for co-operation is now. I believe in that saying. I think that it's very important for good governance that everyone co-operate. Ladies and gentlemen, that's what we were elected to do.

5:20

**The Deputy Speaker:** Anyone wish to participate under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

**Mr. Martin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wasn't necessarily planning this, but I'm sure the hon. House leader really wants me to speak at this particular time and the Minister of Education and all the rest of them. [interjections] I thought you were begging me to speak. Anyhow, I've got a few things to say. I think I can put together some things to say.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to just review where we're at, and I think that I will come to the point we talked about. I remember when we made the serious cuts back in the mid-90s. Now, clearly, at the time we had a deficit problem. I would argue that we didn't have a debt problem. But we hacked everything, especially needed social services, such as education and health care and help for the poor. So we were facing that particular problem.

Then when the economy started to get better, we still had what I call the social deficit. We were preoccupied with the economic deficit to the detriment of worrying about the rest of the social deficit. I would argue that we're still playing catch-up from the severe cuts of the mid-90s. Whether it be in education, whether it be in health care, whether it be in help for the poor, and the rest of it, we haven't caught up.

Along with this, we've developed a strategy for the oil and gas industry and the tar sands and the rest of it. Our economic strategy is to get in there, get the oil and gas out, develop the tar sands at the fastest possible rate that we can, all to get into the American market, Mr. Speaker. I know there's pressure from the Americans. I know there's pressure from the federal government to do this. They want this source that they say is secure, but that's not necessarily what's good for Alberta.

So now you tie the two things together: the cuts that we're trying to deal with to catch up and come back from – and I think even the government recognized that they had to catch up there – and you tie that on with this, as I said before, economy on steroids. We're trying to now deal with all those problems with the cuts from before and in Calgary with a hundred thousand people coming in.

We were told by the economic development department and at hearings in Medicine Hat the task force was told by people that presented there that we should expect a population in Alberta of 6 million people in the next 10 to 15 years. That's double the population now after we've had the population explosion that we know about. How do you begin to deal with the serious social and infrastructure problems with that sort of population increase? It's impossible to do, Mr. Speaker. What's the point of having 6 million people if the majority of people aren't benefiting in the so-called Alberta advantage? You know, what's generally good for the CEOs in downtown Calgary is not necessarily good for the rest of Albertans.

Let me just talk about the task force. I can't talk about what's coming out of it, obviously, but we can talk about the public

hearings. The calls that we heard right across the province – and I mentioned this earlier. It's severe. You know, we knew about Fort McMurray. We knew about Grande Prairie. We knew about Edmonton and Calgary. But I found out that everywhere in Alberta we're facing some of the same problems of low vacancy rates and homelessness in places that I didn't expect, like Hinton. That was the biggest surprise.

So where is the Alberta advantage for a lot of people in this province? How do you keep up, you know, with a 10.6 per cent increase in population coming in every year, Mr. Speaker? Admittedly people, as somebody said, come in for better jobs and dreams, but they find when they get here that they can't even find a place to live. In Grande Prairie they said: don't bother coming up even if you have a job because we have no place to put you. Now, does that make any sense at all? The reality is – the previous Premier finally admitted it – we were saying in that legislative session in the summer, the short one that we had, that the government didn't have a plan. The members opposite were all standing up and saying: yes, we have a plan; it's a wonderful plan. Finally Premier Klein uttered the truth: we don't have a plan. I would argue that we still don't have one. We talk about one, but we still don't have one.

I want to again talk just to put a human face on this, Mr. Speaker. These are calls – I've been allowed to say their names publicly – that I've had from people just the last week talking about their problems in housing and rents. Here's one: rent has gone up \$350 in the past six months. Another woman, 71 years old, is now looking for a job because she can't afford to pay her rent. She's got to go back to work. Another one: rent is going up 30 per cent. Another one works full time and still cannot afford rent. Another one calls regarding rent costs. Another one: rent has gone up \$375 in five months. Now, how do we expect people on fixed incomes and working in service jobs, even if you're well employed, to keep up with this sort of thing? How is that an Alberta advantage? I ask you that. How is that an Alberta advantage?

You know, I admit that we're having the task force, and I give the minister and the Premier credit for that. They've put opposition people on, and we've certainly got an earful. I hope that they'll listen. We'll see what the report says, and we'll see what the government does after that.

Mr. Speaker, it's not just housing – that's a big one – but we're talking about health care. The minister is here. Yesterday he crisis managed, as we do, and I don't blame the minister. It certainly was crisis management dealing with the Fort McMurray situation. All last year we talked about the problems in Fort McMurray in this Legislature. Finally they did something about it, but that will not solve the problems.

The announcement yesterday that the minister is involved with: yeah, fine. We need to do something. But, you know, when I look at the money – an \$8,000 bonus to stay for part-time doctors – that's going to be some interesting negotiation when the minister has to go deal with the nurses and other health professionals with that sort of situation. Then we look at what they're looking at, and if this isn't crisis management, tell me what is. It says, "The unique circumstances of communities under pressure," and that's every community in the province if what I'm hearing from the task force is right. [interjection] Yeah, well, you want to clap about that when people are homeless and they can't find a place to rent and the rents are going up and they can't find a doctor? You thump for that, hon. member? Go ahead and thump because Albertans aren't thumping, I assure you about that.

What it says is that the communities under pressure . . . That's the minister's term.

. . . and under-served areas will be addressed through the new



clinical stabilization initiative. These communities will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis. A provincial framework for under-serviced areas is to be finalized.

Apparently that's about \$56 million. The \$8,000 bonuses for part-time doctors is \$47 million, and then we say that other, special funding – we're not sure where – "has been designated to address extraordinary increases in practice costs." Well, this is crisis management.

Admittedly, something had to be done, and I'm not critical of the fact that this has come forward, but it shows the problem with the lack of planning. In health care even more severe shortages – and we talked about that today, Mr. Speaker – are there with the nurses and other health professionals. What do we do about that when that comes forward? How do we get those people in again when you have a 10.6 per cent growth rate because of, sort of, this overstimulation? We're afraid to put on a moratorium for a little while with the new projects, even though Fort McMurray and others are asking for it, just to slow it down and see what we can do. The government refuses to do that. They won't put the brake on the pedal, but they want to do it on the cheap. You can't do this.

5:30

If you want to keep this pace of development up, you're going to have to spend a lot more money – and that's why I'll be interested in the budget – on the social and physical infrastructure. You can't do it on the cheap, have this pace of development and not do that. As I said, we are facing the problems from the severe cuts in the past. We hadn't caught up there.

So for a lot of Albertans this so-called advantage for the people that live here has become a big disadvantage. It has become a big, big disadvantage for many people, and if the members wanted to come around and listen to the task force, they would have heard that. We heard that very loud and clear, Mr. Speaker, from the people that took the time to come out to the task force.

Mr. Speaker, the other thing I just want to allude to briefly is part of the crisis management. Now we're going to hear P3s, the big answer.

**An Hon. Member:** Alternative financing.

**Mr. Martin:** Yeah, alternative financing. It hardly has even worked anywhere.

To think that this isn't creating a debt, this is when I get amazed by this government. They're so worried that people see that they have a debt that they say: well, we'll have a P3; that's not really a debt. But when you're paying as we do on Henday and the ring road and these others, is it not a debt if you have to pay \$21 million for 30 years? Is that not a debt? You know the old saying: if it looks like a duck and quacks like a duck, it's a duck, Mr. Speaker.

The reality is that they say: well, gee, this solves our problems because they'll be responsible for all the problems. Well, they've created more problems. It worked in many cases in Nova Scotia where, admittedly, it was the Liberal government that brought it in and a Conservative government that got rid of it. There were all the problems there with the schools and the shoddy workmanship. We'll have this debate in the Legislature a little more, you know, about some of the problems. But just to think that it's not a debt, only the Conservatives' economic philosophy could say: you're responsible for \$21 million for 30 years, but that's not a debt. Conservative economics, Mr. Speaker. Amazing. Absolutely amazing that they try to tell people that that's not a debt.

You know, to think that these companies . . . [interjection] Oh, I'm getting a reaction. I love that. Mr. Minister, we'll have lots of time to debate this.

Mr. Speaker, do we think that these P3 companies – and we'd be interested to see how many of them donate to the Conservative Party – that come in are not shrewd enough to think that they're going to make a good profit over that period of time? They're not in business not to make a profit. As I think the Member for Calgary-Varsity said: if you've got the money, why do you want to pay a mortgage over that period of time? We wouldn't tell individuals to do that – would we? – so that they could pay a lot of extra money over 30 years. Well, maybe Conservatives would. I'm not sure about that.

Even if you had to borrow on P3s, with our rate we can get that better and cheaper than private companies can. If we had to borrow, why would we not do it that way, Mr. Speaker? You know why we want to do it this way? Well, partly ideology. You know, this government operates from the right, with a triumph of ideology over common sense quite often. The reality is that if we had to pay for it the old-fashioned way, it would still be cheaper, but beyond ideology they want to say that we don't have a debt on the books because they've become pre-occupied with that.

As I say, even if we have to pay it over 30 years, somehow they've determined in their economics that this is not a debt. Albertans are smarter than that, Mr. Speaker. They know that. This will be an interesting debate that we can hold in the Legislature this year, on what I call crisis management.

I just want to talk a little bit about transparency, and I'm going to give the government some credit. [interjections] Yeah, I know that this is going to be hard on you. I think we've made some steps in this Legislature that are a step in the right direction. There are still some problems with Bill 1, and hopefully the government will listen, but at least we have a lobbyists registry coming forward. I don't think it's adequate enough, but at least it's an acknowledgement that we need to do that. This government refused to do that for many years, so that's at least a step in the right direction.

Some of the changes that we're making in the Legislature I think are more democratic and I think that they are a big step in the right direction. I said this on the bill yesterday, and I give the government and the Premier and the House leader credit for that.

We'll leave it when I was being positive. How's that?

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Member for Peace River under Standing Order 29(2)(a), I presume.

**Mr. Oberle:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd just like to ask a question of the hon. member. I'm concerned about the stance regarding P3s, to the point where it almost seems as if this member would rather have us throw money off a bridge than see any company make a nickle in profit, and I'm really concerned. I would ask him what his response would be to the Auditor General, who said in Public Accounts last year – he can check *Hansard* – that if any minister that's undertaking a large public works project in his department didn't examine a P3 as a funding option, he would simply not be doing his job. With apologies, I paraphrase the quote, obviously. I would also ask the hon. member: if things are so awful here in Alberta, why does he think a hundred thousand people a year are moving here?

**Mr. Martin:** Mr. Speaker, it happens in all boom economies. People hear that the streets are paved with gold. They hear about the big jobs in Fort McMurray and the rest of them. I don't blame them for coming. They're looking, as somebody said opposite, for their dreams and for good jobs. It's always going to happen in a boom economy. Alberta is no exception in that regard.

All I'm saying is that the boom could be tempered somewhat by the pace of development. That's a reality. When it's too extreme,

when ordinary people here in Alberta can't afford to live and there's more homeless, then we have a problem, and this government better recognize it.

The second question. As the Auditor General also said, they're not necessarily good or bad, admittedly. What he said, though, is that there better be a public-sector guarantor, that we know what we're doing with them. We found out with Henday that what the government said about the public-sector guarantor was not what happened, because it was leaked to us what actually happened, and what the government had talked about was very different from what the public-sector guarantor had said about that particular program. Take a look, hon. member, and see if I'm not right about that. So we have to be very careful if we're going to have some of these things. There has to be a public-sector comparator, Mr. Speaker. So far we haven't seen that with this government.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

**Rev. Abbott:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess that my questions and my comments are, number one: is this guy for real? I mean, he's talking like we're living in an NDP government in Saskatchewan or something. Does he really believe even half of what he's saying? I mean, come on. Wake up and look around. Things are good here, man. Admit it. We're in a boom economy right now, and that's because we have a good government.

Mr. Speaker, I know that Saskatchewan and B.C., which are both under NDP governments, are sitting on just as much resources.

**Ms DeLong:** B.C. is not NDP.

**Rev. Abbott:** Sorry. B.C. is Liberal. It's the same thing.

They're sitting on just as much resources as we have here in Alberta, and they can't make it work. So, Mr. Speaker, my question is: does he not realize that? If he doesn't, why doesn't he go there where he can be part of the gang?

5:40

**Mr. Martin:** That's pretty feeble, frankly. I've lived in Alberta a lot longer than you, hon. member. We don't all have to think the same way to be Albertans. Mr. Speaker, the point is: are you really saying that there are the same resources in Saskatchewan as there are in Alberta? If you are saying that, I'll say it back to you: are you for real? Are you for real? I mean, are you saying that it was this good government that came down, and there it was, that this Conservative

government said, "Let there be oil and gas," and lo and behold there was oil and gas, and therefore they're the government, and they're doing such a wonderful job? As I said to the member, if he wants to say it, I'd say the same thing back in the most positive way: get real.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

**Mr. VanderBurg:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know that the member opposite has been a great contributor to the housing task force. I do thank you for the work that you've done on that with the all-party committee. Today we heard the Liberal opposition talk about rent controls, that we need to institute rent controls because of the supply issue out there and the people can't afford to stay in their homes. I want to know from you: do you think that rent controls would bring new buildings to Alberta, would bring new construction to Alberta, would increase the supply to Albertans? You've heard from Albertans directly.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Unfortunately, the time for discussion and questions is over on this issue.

Are there any other participants under the throne speech?

**Mr. VanderBurg:** Mr. Speaker, I'd like the answer to that. All the colleagues here in this Assembly would. We've given you the power to expand.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Unfortunately, hon. member, the Standing Orders are made up by the Assembly. I'm here to administer them, and we don't change them on the go.

The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

**Mr. Snelgrove:** Mr. Speaker, I would move that we adjourn debate on response to the throne speech.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

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

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just because the place is getting far too lively, I would move that we adjourn until tomorrow at 1 p.m.

[Motion carried; at 5:42 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Thursday at 1 p.m.]