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The 27th Legislature
First Session

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The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

First Session

Kowalski, Hon. Ken, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock, Speaker
 Cao, Wayne C.N., Calgary-Fort, Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
 Mitzel, Len, Cypress-Medicine Hat, Deputy Chair of Committees

<p>Ady, Hon. Cindy, Calgary-Shaw (PC), Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation</p> <p>Allred, Ken, St. Albert (PC)</p> <p>Amery, Moe, Calgary-East (PC)</p> <p>Anderson, Rob, Airdrie-Chestermere (PC), Parliamentary Assistant, Solicitor General and Public Security</p> <p>Benito, Carl, Edmonton-Mill Woods (PC)</p> <p>Berger, Evan, Livingstone-Macleod (PC), Parliamentary Assistant, Sustainable Resource Development</p> <p>Bhardwaj, Naresh, Edmonton-Ellerslie (PC)</p> <p>Bhullar, Manmeet Singh, Calgary-Montrose (PC), Parliamentary Assistant, Advanced Education and Technology</p> <p>Blackett, Hon. Lindsay, Calgary-North West (PC), Minister of Culture and Community Spirit</p> <p>Blakeman, Laurie, Edmonton-Centre (L), Official Opposition House Leader</p> <p>Boutilier, Guy C., Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (PC)</p> <p>Brown, Dr. Neil, QC, Calgary-Nose Hill (PC)</p> <p>Calahasen, Pearl, Lesser Slave Lake (PC)</p> <p>Campbell, Robin, West Yellowhead (PC), Deputy Government Whip</p> <p>Chase, Harry B., Calgary-Varsity (L), Official Opposition Whip</p> <p>Dallas, Cal, Red Deer-South (PC)</p> <p>Danyluk, Hon. Ray, Lac La Biche-St. Paul (PC), Minister of Municipal Affairs</p> <p>DeLong, Alana, Calgary-Bow (PC)</p> <p>Denis, Jonathan, Calgary-Egmont (PC)</p> <p>Doerksen, Arno, Strathmore-Brooks (PC)</p> <p>Drysdale, Wayne, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (PC)</p> <p>Elniski, Doug, Edmonton-Calder (PC)</p> <p>Evans, Hon. Iris, Sherwood Park (PC), Minister of Finance and Enterprise</p> <p>Fawcett, Kyle, Calgary-North Hill (PC)</p> <p>Forsyth, Heather, Calgary-Fish Creek (PC)</p> <p>Fritz, Hon. 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Mary Anne, Red Deer-North (PC), Minister of Seniors and Community Supports</p> <p>Jacobs, Broyce, Cardston-Taber-Warner (PC)</p> <p>Johnson, Jeff, Athabasca-Redwater (PC)</p> <p>Johnston, Art, Calgary-Hays (PC)</p> <p>Kang, Darshan S., Calgary-McCall (L)</p> <p>Klimchuk, Hon. Heather, Edmonton-Glenora (PC), Minister of Service Alberta</p> <p>Knight, Hon. Mel, Grande Prairie-Smoky (PC), Minister of Energy</p> <p>Leskiw, Genia, Bonnyville-Cold Lake (PC)</p>	<p>Liepert, Hon. Ron, Calgary-West (PC), Minister of Health and Wellness</p> <p>Lindsay, Hon. Fred, Stony Plain (PC), Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security</p> <p>Lukaszk, Thomas A., Edmonton-Castle Downs (PC), Parliamentary Assistant, Municipal Affairs</p> <p>Lund, Ty, Rocky Mountain House (PC)</p> <p>MacDonald, Hugh, Edmonton-Gold Bar (L)</p> <p>Marz, Richard, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (PC)</p> <p>Mason, Brian, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (NDP), Leader of the NDP Opposition</p> <p>McFarland, Barry, Little Bow (PC)</p> <p>McQueen, Diana, Drayton Valley-Calmar (PC), Parliamentary Assistant, Environment</p> <p>Morton, Hon. F.L., Foothills-Rocky View (PC), Minister of Sustainable Resource Development</p> <p>Notley, Rachel, Edmonton-Strathcona (NDP), Deputy Leader of the NDP Opposition, NDP Opposition House Leader</p> <p>Oberle, Frank, Peace River (PC), Government Whip</p> <p>Olson, Verlyn, QC, Wetaskiwin-Camrose (PC)</p> <p>Ouellette, Hon. Luke, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (PC), Minister of Transportation</p> <p>Pastoor, Bridget Brennan, Lethbridge-East (L), Deputy Official Opposition Whip</p> <p>Prins, Ray, Lacombe-Ponoka (PC)</p> <p>Quest, Dave, Strathcona (PC)</p> <p>Redford, Hon. Alison M., Calgary-Elbow (PC), Minister of Justice and Attorney General</p> <p>Renner, Hon. Rob, Medicine Hat (PC), Minister of Environment, Deputy Government House Leader</p> <p>Rodney, Dave, Calgary-Lougheed (PC)</p> <p>Rogers, George, Leduc-Beaumont-Devon (PC)</p> <p>Sandhu, Peter, Edmonton-Manning (PC)</p> <p>Sarich, Janice, Edmonton-Decore (PC), Parliamentary Assistant, Education</p> <p>Sherman, Dr. Raj, Edmonton-Meadowlark (PC), Parliamentary Assistant, Health and Wellness</p> <p>Snelgrove, Hon. Lloyd, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC), President of the Treasury Board</p> <p>Stelmach, Hon. Ed, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (PC), Premier, President of Executive Council</p> <p>Stevens, Hon. Ron, QC, Calgary-Glenmore (PC), Deputy Premier, Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations</p> <p>Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (L)</p> <p>Taft, Dr. Kevin, Edmonton-Riverview (L), Leader of the Official Opposition</p> <p>Tarchuk, Hon. Janis, Banff-Cochrane (PC), Minister of Children and Youth Services</p> <p>Taylor, Dave, Calgary-Currie (L), Deputy Leader of the Official Opposition</p> <p>VanderBurg, George, Whitecourt-St. Anne (PC)</p> <p>Vandermeer, Tony, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (PC)</p> <p>Weadick, Greg, Lethbridge-West (PC)</p> <p>Webber, Len, Calgary-Foothills (PC), Parliamentary Assistant, Energy</p> <p>Woo-Paw, Teresa, Calgary-Mackay (PC)</p> <p>Xiao, David H., Edmonton-McClung (PC), Parliamentary Assistant, Employment and Immigration</p> <p>Zwozdesky, Hon. Gene, Edmonton-Mill Creek (PC), Minister of Aboriginal Relations, Deputy Government House Leader</p>
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[Errata, if any, appear inside back cover]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, April 22, 2008

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

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

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

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

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to this Assembly some guests that have come here tonight to hear my maiden speech: Drew Hutton, the former MLA for Edmonton-Glenora; a number of friends and colleagues from the campaign trail; my good friend Joan Pitfield; Landon Miller and Carol Anderson, my fabulous staff; Ken Chapman; Craig and Eve Rose; Madelyn Todd; Sharon Matthias; Susan Green, who just returned from Africa; Richard Wong; and Brian Hlus. Could you please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to introduce to you and through you two members who have come up here to hear my maiden speech. The first is Liza Tega. Liza has been a Canadian for the last 12 years, serving in a variety of occupations, the last four and a half years – and it's a testament to her character and strength of commitment and tremendous patience – working primarily with the MLA for Calgary-Buffalo, putting humpty dumpty together again in the mornings and evenings. Liza is a tremendous person. I'm really happy to have her here.

The second is another resident of Calgary-Buffalo, who has been a wonderful hockey coach, a tremendous public educator, and a great dad. That's my father, Mr. Dick Hehr.

Could you please rise.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 5

Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2008

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

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to move second reading of Bill 5, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2008.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Aboriginal Relations.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to move adjournment of debate on Bill 5, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2008.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Consideration of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech

Mrs. Leskiw 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 April 21: Mr. Blackett]

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

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with great honour that I rise today and second the Speech from the Throne. As the newly elected Member for Edmonton-Glenora and Minister of Service Alberta I am proud to stand and offer my thoughts on the bold direction our government is leading the province of Alberta in. Guided by the leadership of Premier Stelmach, I am excited by the opportunities that are present today and on the horizon for the people of Alberta.

Standing today before you and the rest of the members of the Assembly, Mr. Speaker, is a truly humbling experience. I must admit that I am still awestruck as I walk through the doors of this Legislature every morning, knowing that I am one of the very few Albertans who has had the privilege of being elected to the Legislative Assembly.

My history and passion for politics far precedes my election as an MLA, and I must say that I have always dreamed of standing exactly where I am today. In 1980 I accepted a position in government members' research for the PC caucus and later worked for Premiers Peter Lougheed and Don Getty as a writer. I used to spend a lot of time looking down from the members' gallery and observing the action. Now I'm looking up into the gallery and really appreciate the support of the Edmonton-Glenora PC board of directors, my campaign volunteers, and very special friends. Mr. Speaker, all of these people were and continue to be instrumental in my success.

In my 15 years with government I learned a great deal about political life and governance, but perhaps no other values were instilled in me more than the three words I campaigned on: integrity, caring, and accountability. I am extremely fortunate to be surrounded by the other 71 members of this government who also hold these values true.

Mr. Speaker, I've been a resident of Edmonton-Glenora for over 18 years, a place where my husband, Wade, and I have been proud to build a home for our two children. I would like to acknowledge the incredible support of my husband and my children, Kyrsten and Keifer, as this is certainly a family commitment we all share.

I believe that Edmonton-Glenora is one of the most diverse constituencies in our province. It contains the communities of Britannia Youngstown, Canora, Glenora, Grovenor, Mayfield, High Park, Inglewood, McQueen, North Glenora, Westmount, and Woodcroft. During my campaign I was extremely privileged to hear from a wide spectrum of people, and one of the reasons I am proud to be here, Mr. Speaker, is the opportunity to champion the causes of all of the residents of Glenora.

There is no doubt that many residents of my constituency have benefited greatly from living in our opportunity-rich province. However, there are many who feel the pressures of a rapidly growing economy and are falling behind. One of my goals as the MLA for Edmonton-Glenora is to facilitate the communication between different members of the community and to listen and respect all views and opinions. I pledge to always speak about the real issues families face and ensure that their important stories are told.

I've always been passionate about finding collaborative approaches to dealing with people, Mr. Speaker, because regardless of

age, income, or profession all Albertans want the same things for themselves and their families. They want safe, secure communities and affordable housing. They want to know that they can receive timely, effective health care for themselves and their families. They want an economy that continues to deliver competitive advantages, infrastructure, schools, and responsible, sustainable government to help deliver it. I'm extremely proud to be a member of a government that has touched on these priorities, outlined in the Speech from the Throne and today's budget.

Mr. Speaker, it was an incredible honour to meet so many people in Glenora on the campaign trail. I thoroughly enjoyed every minute, even during the days of minus 30-degree weather when the hood of my parka was white with frost. I always took the time to have great conversations with voters and heard from people at over 3,200 doorsteps within my constituency. One such example is when I had the privilege of visiting the Jasper Place health and wellness centre on Stony Plain Road. This is the only drop-in centre in the west end for the homeless, unemployed, and anyone else who needs support. Murray and Scott opened the centre two years ago, and it is run by volunteers and donations only. There's always coffee and hot lunches available, shower and laundry facilities, and storage lockers. This facility is a safe and secure place for people of all ages to connect.

The Jasper Place health and wellness centre also operates an ID clinic where people are given identification so they can use it to help re-establish themselves and get the support they need. It is interesting that now as Minister of Service Alberta, the department responsible for issuing identification to Albertans, I see first-hand the importance and value of having secure ID available in today's world. Since the Jasper Place health and wellness centre's creation Murray and Scott have helped place 120 people into transitional housing. Some of these people have been on the streets for a very long time, and by offering a hand up, Murray and Scott are committed to helping those people succeed at this critical point in their lives. It continues to be a welcoming place, free of judgment and discrimination. I'm so very proud to have an organization like this in my constituency that makes a difference every day.

To say that my life has changed drastically since being elected the MLA for Edmonton-Glenora is quite an understatement. The gravity of the fact that I have been entrusted with a huge responsibility to my constituents and the reputation of the government of Alberta is not lost on me. As Premier Stelmach has stated, governing is a privilege that has to be earned every day. I have been a lifelong volunteer, Mr. Speaker, and I consider this new path in my life a continuation of the passion I have for helping people and my community. I've always viewed volunteerism and advocacy as a profession, and one should never underestimate the role of volunteers and the impact they have on everything we do. In fact, we simply can't do it without them, and I can say with complete confidence that I wouldn't be here without them either.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to once again thank the people of Edmonton-Glenora for trusting me with their voice, and I would once again like to reaffirm my commitment to them and to all Albertans that I will conduct myself by my own guiding principles of integrity, caring, and accountability.

Thank you.

7:40

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, section 29(2)(a) calls for five minutes for questions and comments. Does anyone wish to speak?

Hearing none, the Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by the Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to begin by expressing

my heartfelt gratitude to the constituents of Calgary-Buffalo who elected me to represent them in this august Assembly. I would also like to congratulate my fellow colleagues of all political stripes for their same success. I am confident that our pragmatic and philosophical differences will enhance the thrust and parry of debate as we address various issues. As individuals and as members of political parties we have a wide diversity of ideas, and this is a good thing for we all know that when we all think alike, we don't think very much.

Despite these differences we act as one in this Legislature for we all have the same job description. That job description is simple; it is to do what is in the best interests of the people of Alberta. However, we must never forget that these decisions are not only to be made in the best interests of the people today but also future generations. As the Eagles sang in my youth, it is the long run we must consider, and as I am not Don Henley, nor do I sing with them, I will resist the urge to break out in song right now.

As we make decisions in this House, it is often the long run that is difficult to consider for we do live with the pressures of this 21st century life, and these pressures are often onerous. The long run is also difficult to consider because as John Maynard Keynes said, "In the long run, we're all dead." This is true for all of us. So we tend to make decisions that tend to satisfy our immediate wants even if they are to future generations' peril. This is a conundrum in which we as politicians often find ourselves. Although we are elected by our constituents to serve in this House for a maximum of five years, the decisions we make in those five years do not only affect those constituents who voted for us on March 3, but they will affect Albertans now and many into the future. Further, these decisions have the potential to affect our fellow Canadians and, even further, to affect the citizens of the world. With that being the case, we must sometimes make decisions that the current electorate may not totally appreciate in order to protect these future generations. These decisions are undoubtedly decisions requiring strength and fortitude.

I at one time had the good fortune of playing junior hockey for the Olds Grizzlys, where written on the dressing room walls was: tough times never last; tough people do. When these tough decisions are made, we should not make them in the name of political expediency. They should be made in regard to what is, in fact, the right thing to do. When we do this, it is called leadership. Let us never forget that we act as temporary stewards of this province, and we have a responsibility to protect, preserve, and, if possible, improve it for future generations. This is the long run to which I hope we are all committed.

Estimates are that Alberta has over 25 per cent of proven petroleum resources. Clearly, Alberta has been truly blessed, and as we know, to whom much is given, much is expected.

Anyone who has done even a cursory amount of study about global warming knows that humanity's existence is at stake. It's why when making many decisions, we must be cognizant of the fact that we may be destroying planet Earth and ignoring our obligations to future generations. When refusing to protect our environment, we sometimes state: well, what about the economy? Certainly, the economy is important. Like all of you I have little desire to live in a tent. However, the economy is an exceedingly short-term rationale for without clean air to breathe or fresh water to drink or should the Earth simply become too hot, we will have no economy. Alberta must become a leader in the battle against global warming. It must develop a green economy sooner rather than later. It is both an environmental necessity and an economic reality. All members of this House need to recognize this as fact and pray for the strength and the courage to be leaders in this green revolution, a revolution that can save our planet and allow us to honour our sacred pledge to

future generations of Albertans. And guess what? With a little bit of leadership on our part, I believe that the ingenuity of Albertans will even allow us to make a buck in this process.

To Albertans like my nephews Marshall and Jackson I make this pledge to you today that I will try and do my small part to ensure that your Earth that you inherit will be similar to our Earth that we have today. I'm certain that on this issue I will not walk alone.

Let me also share with you two issues I will make no compromise on. A health care system that is not good enough for all of us is not good enough for any of us, and by the same token an education system that is not good enough for all of us is not good enough for any of us.

Like most Albertans I was born in a public hospital. It was the Holy Cross hospital. This hospital is no longer in existence as it was sold to private interests at fire-sale prices by this government. Also, in 1991 as a result of being a victim of a drive-by shooting, I spent some seven months in the Calgary General hospital. This institution was blown up in 1996. To date the hospital beds that went missing after the closure of the Holy Cross and the blowing up of the General have not been restored by this government even though Calgary's population has increased 20 per cent since that time. At the same time, roughly 25 per cent of Alberta's population do not have a family doctor. How did this happen? The simple answer, folks, is: this House let it happen. It's time for this House to become recommitted to public health care for everyone.

When I talk about public education, I cannot help but think about my parents, Dick and Judy Hehr, proud public schoolteachers. They have taught me that the primary goal of public education is to bring people together and provide a sense of hope, a hope for a better tomorrow. I believe that the prime duty of our government is to provide to all Albertans an education that is second to none in order that hope rings rampant throughout the youth of our great province.

My father is from Medicine Hat. He was the first of his family to go to university, and he became a schoolteacher. My mother was raised on a farm in Nobleford, Alberta, a daughter of immigrants from Holland. My mother and all three of her sisters obtained university degrees and became teachers. My parents and grandparents valued public education. They didn't take it for granted, maybe because for them it was an opportunity of which they were unable to take full advantage. None of them had graduated from high school, but the 1920s and '30s were tough times. My grandparents' families, like many Albertans during this period, struggled to survive.

John Ralston Saul recently stated the following of public education:

What this means is that the primary arm for the creation of citizens, whether children of people born in Canada or immigrants, lies in the hands of the provinces. It is their most important responsibility. And it is regional, national and international at the same time. You may be for or against globalization. But at the end of the day, the ability of our young citizens to face the various effects of the opening of borders lies in the hands of the provincial . . . governments. That is, it lies in their obligation to provide universal public education; to maintain the [last] century and a half . . . of a middle class egalitarian inclusive society.

It is my most humble opinion that we have let our commitment to public education slide. We have let it slide to where families are choosing private schools over public education, many times because there is simply no public education facility in their community. What we must ask ourselves is: why is this happening? It is happening because this Legislature is letting it happen. In other words, this Legislature is failing to act in the best interests of the children of Alberta.

7:50

In Calgary alone there are over 30 new communities that need public schools. Yes, yes, yes, I do know that the Premier did announce that approximately nine new schools would be built during the last election, and I applaud him for that. However, should it take an election to announce new schools? There once was a time in this great province that when a community needed a school, the government would build a school. There once was a time in this great province when textbooks and basic school supplies were provided, not considered an extra cost for parents. There once was a time in this great province when teachers could concentrate on teaching children how to read and not worry about what fundraising activity they had to do next.

We have let things slide to the point where the stories of our schools' successes have been replaced with stories about how our schools are crumbling. The disheartening thing is that it is not only the bricks and mortar that have been crumbling in schools like Ernest Manning and Western Canada high school, but the entire fabric of the strong public education system has been eroded, and the results are clear on what has happened because of this approach to public education. In Alberta we have the great shame of only graduating 70 per cent of our students. This is the lowest graduation rate in Canada. Clearly, this is something we need to rectify. This is not the 1920s and 1930s, when Alberta was a have-not province, and many were forced by necessity to leave school and go to work. We can do better. We must do better.

As previously mentioned, I am the victim of a drive-by shooting. Although this happened 17 years ago, I am aware that gun crime is up by at least 30 per cent last year in the city of Calgary. I submit that much of this increase in gun violence can be attributed to the rise in gang activity. I know that the constituents of Calgary-Buffalo are highly alarmed at this increase. In fact, many of my constituents believe that our cities are no place for guns. I also know that for the most part our federal government is in charge of making criminal law, and on that note I support recent trends in sentencing people who use guns to commit crimes to long sentences. Actually, it is my belief that there are three things necessary for the rehabilitation of an individual who uses a gun in the commission of a crime, and these are more walls, more bars, and more guards.

But I digress. I suggest to you that there are tools in this Legislature that can be used to give police officers a hand up in our province's fight against gang-related gun violence. In this regard, I hope this Legislature will consider drafting a law similar to that brought in by former Solicitor General and MLA for Calgary-Buffalo, Mr. Harvey Cenaiko. I believe I've discussed that ad nauseam already here in this House. We have to support that type of initiative where we support our police, take back our streets, and rid ourselves of gun violence that is happening on the day-to-day streets of Calgary.

Now I'll talk about Calgary-Buffalo. It has seniors' centres, six of them in my riding. The simple fact is that many seniors are facing a difficult time right now, with fixed incomes as well as the pressures of living in a booming economy. I would ask this House to continue to support them and try and look at things like possibly indexing the seniors' benefit to rise with inflation like our MLA salaries. Calgary-Buffalo is also inhabited by a great many people of differing sexual orientations. I think it would go a long way for us in this House to do the simple thing and recognize them under protection of our human rights law. It would go a long way to making them feel included.

Well, that's quite a laundry list of things I would like to do in this Legislature, to work on over this legislative term. In fact, there are many more things I would like to mention. Nonetheless, I have been told a time or two that I enjoy the sound of my own voice much

more than others do. Accordingly, I would like to finish the way I started this speech.

Let us never forget the long run. Let us never retreat from making the difficult decision, and when we do make a decision that shows great leadership and yet we incur the wrath of our constituents, remember that times change; history will be our judge. Remember also at these times when your phone is ringing off the hook what was written in the Olds Grizzlies' dressing room: tough times never last; tough people do. I believe this province is full of tough people, just like this House is. I also believe that we truly live in the best of times. I look forward to us working together on behalf of the people of Alberta during the course of this Legislature sitting.

Mr. Speaker, thank you for giving me the time to make this, my maiden speech.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, section 29(2)(a) is available for anyone who wishes to speak.

The Minister of Aboriginal Relations.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you. I was riveted on the words of our eloquent new Member for Calgary-Buffalo, in particular his passion for education. I wanted to know whether the hon. member is aware that this government spends the most money per capita on K to 12 education anywhere in the country. We also spend the most money per student anywhere in the dominion of Canada.

I was struck by his point about our high school graduation rates. I don't believe we're the lowest, but I think we're somewhere in the middle, but that's not the point. What I wanted to ask the hon. member is whether or not he had any suggestions based on his door-knocking or his own readings or his own wisdom as to how we might help improve high school completion rates in our province given the statistics I've just given.

Mr. Hehr: What I would suggest – and I'm not an educator – is that I would concentrate primarily on beginning school reading. That is where the best place to start is. That's where the highest impact is. I'd also try to follow up on sort of what leads maybe have done in Europe, where we start kids as early as we can in the school system, get them going to classes. Let's start them a year earlier. I really think that has advantages. I believe, looking at the school systems over there, that they're doing possibly a little better job than us. The earlier you start them reading, the better off they're going to be.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any others?

If not, before we move to the next speaker, I'd like to apologize for a slip that I made in not addressing the previous speaker by her title, Minister of Service Alberta.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise in response to the Speech from the Throne. As I take my place in this Assembly, I'm acutely conscious of the people I represent, the citizens of Edmonton-Decore, who sent me here to action their priorities and interests on their behalf.

Mine is a very urban constituency. My colleagues in this Assembly who are from rural areas have a strong sense of how rural Alberta has continued to change over the last decade and of the implications for action required by representatives from rural areas. I know that these colleagues will be vigorous in bringing these concerns forward. I can assure you that the changes in urban Alberta in recent years have been absolutely dramatic as well and that these new urban realities will be a focus for much of my efforts in this Assembly.

I want to say at the outset that I am not just talking about problems to be solved. In fact, in many ways the rich, diverse, and vibrant nature of Alberta cities also offers a firm foundation for further progress. At the same time, it is not surprising that these current urban realities have created challenges for representatives at all levels of government and that meeting those challenges is my primary concern as a member of this Assembly. I have long believed that with the pace of change in Alberta being so dramatic, we need to be wise stewards who both understand and help shape these changes.

So, Mr. Speaker, what is it that our constituents expect from us in these times of enormous change, particularly in my urban setting? One of the great advantages of a hard-fought election campaign is that it allows us to meet and talk with so many of the people that we have come to represent. In my case I met literally thousands of residents of Edmonton-Decore: seniors, new Canadians, members of dozens of different ethnic and cultural groups, community leaders, stay-at-home moms, small business owners, and people struggling to pay their rent. Obviously, they have a range of concerns depending on their situations, but there were some common views on some key issues that are important for our work as representatives.

One thing that they are not asking is for their government to solve all their problems and do everything for them. Rather, it seems to me that what they want from their government is to create the context and circumstances where they themselves can realistically work to achieve their own goals for their families through their efforts. To that end, they count on their government to put in place the kinds of reasonable supports to make their own personal efforts pay off. For example, our new Canadians are absolutely committed to seeing their children succeed, and they know that education is the key to that success. They want and need a strong system of public education, one that develops the full potential of every child, and they deserve it.

8:00

Our seniors have long understood the importance of hard work and individual effort, and our cities and communities were built through their efforts. Now when many of them encounter the problems often associated with age and declining health, they expect their government to put in place policies, programs, and services to ensure that they can live with dignity and reasonable well-being, and they deserve it.

It seems to me that the situation is similar to that of government's role related to business. In most cases, with the exception of some important public services, Albertans don't want their government to run businesses. Instead, they want their government to create the conditions in which companies and their employees can flourish and prosper so that we can all benefit. In the process of doing so, they also expect their representatives to oversee a government that is efficient, effective, and accountable but also one that is responsive, humane, and compassionate. No small task, Mr. Speaker, but I think we're up for the challenge.

I believe that there is much that we can do to address the pressing concerns of Alberta's cities consistent with the general approach I have described. With respect to seniors there is much to be gained by emphasizing and providing supports for home care, ensuring high and well-enforced standards for continuing care, and examining the issues with respect to establishing a seniors' advocate to deal with important concerns. On the issue of funding for cities we can support local authorities by providing predictable, stable, and sufficient funding arrangements to enable our cities and school boards to effectively meet their mandates and deal with local priorities. In the area of education we can focus our efforts from

early childhood to postsecondary through all stages of education to help develop the gifts, talents, and full potential of all of Alberta's children and youth.

It is increasingly clear that there is an enormous opportunity to make the biggest differences in the area of early learning, where our investments will pay the greatest dividends later in reduced expenditures in education, justice, health, and social systems. We need to build upon our approach to promoting early learning in our province, making it more comprehensive, including supporting young mothers with infants, to more developmentally based child care to some of the recommendations in Alberta's Commission on Learning in regard to kindergarten. In the process we need to make clear that we're not trying to take over for Alberta families; rather, we are trying to meaningfully support them in their vital work.

With respect to health care, Mr. Speaker, we have clear opportunities to bring about more efficiencies, including the contentious and expensive area of pharmaceuticals, through expanded bulk buying agreements. In addition, there are great untapped opportunities in the area of health promotion as opposed to dealing with illness after the fact through more systematic efforts in health and learning in our schools. We have our children in our schools for 200 days per year for 13 years. I am confident that we can accomplish great gains with students in the key areas of nutrition, exercise, illness prevention, and health promotion through a comprehensive approach to health and learning at the school and school system levels, and in the long term we will save billions in health care costs in the process. We can do all of this in the context of a clear commitment to preserving and enhancing our environment in sustainable ways as a core element of smart planning for economic growth.

Mr. Speaker, I want to focus for a moment on the enormous range of diversity that exists today in Alberta's cities in terms of culture, ethnicity, religion, and experiences. In my constituency I had discussions with many representatives from our Vietnamese, Somalian, Filipino, Chinese, Arabic, and African communities along with so many others who came to Edmonton from places around the globe. There is a tendency on the part of some people to see diversity and difference as a problem to be solved or an obstacle to be overcome when the reality is precisely the opposite: our diversity is actually an asset to be capitalized on and a potential source of our greatest strength. These people chose Canada, Alberta, and Edmonton. They had the courage to leave previous situations in hope of a better life and to take on the daunting task of starting anew in an unfamiliar setting. Their varied experiences, fresh views, and work ethic are important elements in meeting the challenges of our new urban realities.

In a major study the Brookings Institution in the United States examined the forces that contribute to innovation and creativity, two elements that we all agree are crucial to success in an increasingly globalized and competitive world. They concluded that there were two key factors: diversity and tolerance. Mr. Speaker, that sounds like Alberta cities and communities to me: a great diversity of peoples and experiences combined with the tolerance and acceptance that make creative and innovative ideas much more likely to grow and flourish.

I have long believed that the greatest wealth this province has is generated by the diverse, intelligent contributions of all the people. Each day year-round Albertans make a piece of history by inspiring today, seizing tomorrow, and building a brighter future for all to enjoy. That is why I'm approaching this task of being a representative in this Assembly with so much well-grounded optimism. We live in a province that is greatly blessed with resources, people, and opportunities. We have a government and a Premier that have received a strong mandate to move forward in the interests of its

citizens, both urban and rural. Mr. Speaker, I'm anxious to demonstrate leadership and a commitment to fairness in serving the interests of my constituents and ultimately all citizens of our great province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, section 29(2)(a) is available for anyone who wants to ask questions or make comments.

Hearing none, the Official Opposition House Leader, followed by the Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, welcome to my fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre. I am now commencing my fourth term of serving those fine people in this Assembly, and this, in fact, is my 13th spring session. I'm very pleased to be back, joining former colleagues and welcoming new colleagues to this Assembly.

While I have an opportunity, I would like to thank very much the voters of Edmonton-Centre but also the volunteers who worked on my campaign, people who donated money to the campaign, and other people that I met all over the city that stopped and said nice things or encouraging things or gave me advice or guidance. It's always appreciated, and I really appreciate people taking the time to do that.

I think that Edmonton-Centre and Edmonton and Alberta are a land of opportunity. We are so lucky to have the great good fortune to have been born into this place or to have chosen to move here where we get to walk around and live and reap the benefits of the dinosaurs having laid down and died here. That oil and gas really enriches our lives and gives us an unbelievable opportunity for many things. We have so much money here, and that money should be able to propel us forward to a number of choices. I'm sure we have a Legislature that many others envy in that we are able to make choices about where money is spent and even where more money is spent, and I am grateful for that.

I'd like to raise some of the issues of those voters that I spoke to as I door-knocked and put them on the record. It's important that I bring their voices forward into this Assembly. A big part of what I think my job is here is to bring those voices into this Assembly and help the rest of my colleagues here understand the issues that are facing the constituents of Edmonton-Centre.

I'm going to touch on a number of areas, including housing, seniors, transit, not-for-profit organizations, payday loans, auto insurance, long-term savings, of course the Vriend decision, transitional housing, AISH, mental health, domestic violence, library funding, long-term care, and funding for CNIB plus Alberta labour laws and child care spaces. That's just my short list for tonight, but these were all raised at the doors. That's why I have so many little funny-coloured pieces of paper. They all come from the notes that I took when I was door-knocking and of people that have come to see me since the election.

8:10

Housing, rental housing in particular, continues to be a monumental issue in Edmonton-Centre and, I'm sure, in many of the urban ridings in Alberta. The lack of any kind of temporary rent controls is really hurting people. People were crying on the door with me as I door-knocked because they could not imagine how they were supposed to be able to find enough money to pay an increase when they'd gone from paying \$550 for a one-bedroom apartment, and they were now looking at \$1,300, \$1,600. I mean, it's unimaginable for me to comprehend what I would do in that situation, and I don't know how they are coping, frankly.

What's happening is they're ending up having to move into a lower quality of accommodation and probably in a section of town that is not as safe for them as before. What I'm hearing is that they're into, in many cases, substandard subsidized housing. They're dealing with things like pest infestation, bedbugs and things that they can't get rid of. That's just the way it is in those kinds of accommodations. Noise. It's unsafe, and that's particularly problematic for young children, who are facing a certain level of stress because of where they live. They're not studying as well. They're not doing as well in school because they're not sure who the strange people are in their corridors that are making noise and running up and down. I won't even go into the horror stories about drug use in the hallways.

People are also concerned about environmental health standards. They're not being enforced, so even where you do have an infestation of bugs or, you know, conditions that are creating asthma or asbestos or mould, they're calling for enforcement, and nothing's happening. They can't get the landlord to improve it. Even when public health comes out, they don't seem to be able to have anything behind them to actually enforce this, so it's really frustrating people in my community. It's making them sick, frankly, and that ends up costing all of us because we're paying health care costs as a result of that.

Again, people are concerned about the lack of control on the amount of increases and the condo conversions, which are taking away a stock of housing that used to be available for rentals. Frankly, we have people in our society who are never going to be able to afford a place to live. They're always going to pay rent either because they're in a transient business or, for whatever reason, they just can't afford it. To not have reasonable, safe rental accommodations is a huge stress.

I have a number of seniors that live in my constituency who are very good to me, give me wonderful advice and guidance. I'm delighted to spend time with them. I have eight seniors' high-rise residences in Edmonton-Centre and a number of other community drop-in centres, so I get to spend a lot of time with seniors and hear a lot from them.

What I'm hearing from them is the concerns they have around the cut-offs for eligibility for funding. If somebody is 50 bucks over the limit, well, that's it; they pay full freight on things. If you're \$51 lower than that, then you're eligible for a whole bunch of subsidies. Frankly, that's always going to happen when you've got some sort of a limit on eligibility. You're always going to have people just above the line. But seniors are really feeling that this is a hardship for them. They were also talking about housing costs and that there is not enough financial support in many cases in the government's benefits programs. For example, dentures I think are available every five years, but people's mouths change as they age, and in fact they're often needing dentures more quickly than five years. For them a \$4,000 to \$6,000 bill to change their dentures is simply beyond their means. Those are the things the seniors wanted me to raise.

We don't have enough transitional housing, and that's something I've spoken about quite a bit in this House. In particular, for people that are really trying to turn their lives around and move on to something else, they need that stable transitional housing to help them bridge out of that old life. They don't want to go back, but frankly if they don't have the transitional housing, the likelihood is pretty good that they will. I'm talking here about drug rehabilitation. I'm talking about people moving away from domestic violence. These are people that are working hard. Parenting teens is another group that need transitional housing.

In my constituency I have La Salle house, I have Jellinek House,

and I have Our House. They all serve different clientele, and they're all struggling. La Salle, in particular, came to see me, and they're just desperate. They are supposed to move people through in under a year, and they've now had clients that have been living there for 18 months. They can't take new people in because they can't move the old ones out because they can't afford to find a place to stay. So you can see how the cycle starts to reverse.

People that I have on AISH are looking for assistance with nonprescription medical needs: diabetic supplies, for example, vitamins, other things that get prescribed for them that aren't covered. I'm sure that in this House, you having been on the doors, you're well aware of the limited funding that is available for someone on AISH. I think we're still at \$1,050 a month.

Mr. MacDonald: Add \$5 to that.

Ms Blakeman: Oh, add \$5 to that. I'm sorry: \$1,055.

They really feel the lack of a consumer advocate to assist them, and also they're seeing a lack of funding to support their not-for-profits that give them assistance and services. The mentally ill in particular, whom I probably love the most, are really finding difficulty accessing support, because they're mentally ill. When you have timelines about, you know, that you'd get cut off if you don't respond within X number of days and it's a short timeline, that's just not going to work for somebody with a mental illness. They miss the timeline, and then they get cut off. I'm thinking: what was the point of this benefit program if all we're doing is cutting off a bunch of people with mental illness? That doesn't strike me as being very helpful.

Mr. MacDonald: Did anyone complain about their power bill?

Ms Blakeman: No, but you're going to talk about that, Edmonton-Gold Bar.

The other issues I'd like to go over are the payday loans, and I have a motion on the books for this session around that. I think we have to look at something that's going to legislate those payday loans.

I'd like to speak briefly about not-for-profit, charitable, volunteer organizations and their capacity, just a few of the things that are happening. The John Howard Society offers some very great value for the services that they have in the community, but a lot of the organizations that receive funding through the victims of crime fund are struggling because there's a cap on that fund of \$100,000 a year. Yet that victims of crime fund is sitting on \$38 million in net assets according to the financial statement found on the Alberta Solicitor General website.

Mr. MacDonald: Thirty-eight million dollars?

Ms Blakeman: Yes. When I was Solicitor General critic a number of years ago, it was in that sort of \$8 million range, so it has increased substantially, yet we're still not getting more money flowing out into the organizations, and there is still a cap in place of \$100,000 that's been in place for a long period of time.

I also note that the CNIB is writing to me and saying that Canada is the only G-8 country that does not publicly support library services to people with print disabilities. You'd think that in this province we'd be able to do that. I'm certainly noticing as I get older that my eyesight is not as good as it was. I'm much more appreciative of things like CART services.

By the way, we don't have CART services available for Legislative Assembly business, so if we have someone with a hearing

problem that comes to one of our policy field committees, for example, or even into the Assembly, there's nothing that's available with closed caption for them to help them understand our proceedings. Surely to heavens that's something that we could be doing in being more inclusive of our constituents.

Here's a situation where people with visual disabilities are having trouble accessing money for Braille. I think a number of you heard a recent news story about kids that couldn't get Braille books on time. These are citizens that should be able to find assistance in Alberta, and they're not finding it right now.

The Legislature Grounds and, in fact, this building are in my riding, and I would certainly like to see some kind of solid plan and public consultation about what's going to happen with the Legislature Grounds. I sat on the committee that was formed by the previous Minister of Infrastructure till his untimely exit from the caucus, and in the end the work of that committee came to nothing. Now here we are two, three years later. The apartment buildings nearby that we had managed to get a moratorium on so they didn't build up and obstruct the view of the Legislature Building from the rest of the city – the moratorium was lifted when that committee was disbanded, and now they're building. It's cutting off our choices about how we will renovate and renew these Legislature Grounds, which should be a jewel of Alberta. They should be something that people from Drayton Valley and Peace River and Calgary and everywhere in our province can come and visit and be proud of, and we're falling down on that one as well.

8:20

I think it's important that we recognize that we have a nonexistent savings plan in this province. Honestly, I'm sure the government would be horrified if we had our population today going: "You know what? I don't think I'll contribute to my RRSP on a regular basis so that I can have a good pension plan when I retire. I think I'll just put into it, gee, when I have a really good year, and I'm not going to determine what that really good year is. I'll just recognize it when it happens." That's exactly what this government is choosing to do about contributions to the heritage savings trust fund. Yes, you've inflation-proofed it – congratulations – but you're not doing regular payments into that fund, and as a result, that fund is not performing as it should be.

Guys, that's not our money. That's the future's money. The oil and gas revenues will decline in this province, and, boy, we're going to have to pay a heavy price when we look down the road and have to admit that right now the government is not collecting enough money in taxes and other fees and licences to be able to sustain the budget that you've got in front of you. We're subsidizing from oil and gas revenues to pay for our everyday services all the time. We have to take between 30 and 50 per cent of those nonrenewable oil and gas revenues and plow it into the heritage savings trust fund.

I'd like to also echo my colleague from Calgary-Buffalo in asking that we write sexual orientation into our human rights legislation as a prohibited grounds of discrimination. I think that's very important.

Library funding is key. We need people to read; we need people to participate; we need people to understand safety manuals and training manuals and to excel in our province. The fact that we continue to fund library funding on old per capita rates is really appalling. We have to step up on that one, and you'll be hearing from me a lot on that.

Of course, long-term care: if we really want those seniors to stay in their own homes, we need to be stepping up on home care funding.

Thank you for the opportunity to raise some of these issues today.

The Acting Speaker: Under section 29(2)(a) five minutes are available for anyone to make comments or ask questions. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to ask the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre if there are any other issues? We all know how wonderful her constituency is. Are there any other issues? She must have knocked on hundreds and thousands of doors during the campaign, and surely the constituents had more instructions for her and more policies and issues for her to bring forward.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Actually, there were more. In particular, labour laws. Alberta's labour laws and child care spaces are two other issues that were raised a lot with me, and I'll admit that I got a lot of support from union members and from working folks in Edmonton-Centre, and I'm very grateful for that. But we certainly do have to have a look at our labour laws, particularly around replacement worker legislation and first contract legislation because those are two glaring omissions in our labour laws right now.

Child care spaces. You know, we keep talking about how short we are of people in the labour force, but we could have a whole bunch more people in our labour force, and that is women, if we were able to have safe, affordable child care spaces for them to leave their children in. I would like to see us get really innovative about that and help the municipalities with some zoning bylaws, changes, and some empowerment through the MGA to allow them to require daycare spaces be built into new buildings, for example, so people could have their kids nearby to where they worked.

So lots of opportunity for people in Edmonton-Centre. Thank you for asking the question and allowing me to get a couple more of my list up. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Any others wish to speak? The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Ouellette: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I just have a hard time when somebody can get up and say that we aren't doing any savings of any kind when every year we inflation-proof the heritage fund. We also have the Alberta heritage medical research fund. We have the education fund. We have the ingenuity fund. There are all those savings plans that we've always had in place, yet the opposition can just get up and act as if we're not doing any of that. It really is happening. So I'm really wondering why she would say those things without clarifying that, yes, we are putting money into savings.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much for the opportunity to address that. That's a good question. Actually, if you look in the budget documents, there's nothing budgeted to go into the heritage savings trust fund. There is inflation-proofing that is now being done. Thank you very much. That was a new addition. But the only money that goes into the heritage savings trust fund is that that is unanticipated surpluses, so that's even beyond any surplus that we would expect to get, that the government has budgeted for. It's only when we get money beyond that – so we're talking a huge bonanza from oil and gas revenues – that the government actually takes money and puts it in. Last year they had a super bonanza, and they put \$937 million into the heritage savings trust fund. Actually, they put in \$918 million, and they've still got \$19 million to come. But they don't budget that. We only get it when it's a windfall, which is why I was giving the comparison about pensioners that only put in when they had a great year but not on a regular basis.

Interestingly enough, the government has not added one dime to

the access to the future fund since it was established. It got a billion bucks to begin with. It was supposed to get \$3 billion. No more money was put into it.

How about the cancer legacy fund? That got \$500 million to go in at the beginning. It never got up to the billion.

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

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to respond today to the Speech from the Throne delivered last week by the Lieutenant Governor. It's also my pleasure to be here to introduce my constituency of Wetaskiwin-Camrose and also myself. But first I want to congratulate you on your election as Deputy Chair of Committees. I also want to acknowledge and congratulate all of my colleagues in the Assembly for their elections. No matter what our political affiliations I'm sure that we're all here with the best interests of our constituents and Albertans in mind, and I look forward to working with everybody as the weeks go along.

There is one other acknowledgement that I've been really anxious to make for some time, actually ever since I got here, and that's to all of the unelected people who work here. When you come here, it can be a little bit intimidating the first few days at work. Everywhere you go, lots of smiles, lots of help, and I really appreciate that from the people who are here. People in every hallway, every office, every parking lot, the cafeteria, in this room: they really make the initiation a lot easier. I wish that more of them were here to hear that because I also want to tell them that they're great ambassadors for Alberta to all the people who come here to this place. I understand that it is a tourist attraction of some note in Edmonton here.

I feel pretty fortunate to represent Wetaskiwin-Camrose. I'm going to give my colleagues a bit of a travelogue because I don't know if all of them have been there. You're all invited. I'll tell you a little bit about the place. It's south of Edmonton, not quite an hour. It lies to the east of the Queen Elizabeth II highway. It includes the cities of Wetaskiwin, Camrose, the town of Millet, the village of Bittern Lake, parts of the counties of Camrose and Wetaskiwin, the hamlets of Gwynne and Ohaton, and of course the Montana and Samson First Nations at Hobbema.

Wetaskiwin means hills of peace, and it's been known as a transportation hub since before Alberta was a province. In fact, a lot of immigrants would come to Wetaskiwin on the train and then head east to Camrose and beyond, sometimes with a cart and horse, sometimes on foot. To this day Wetaskiwin is still known as a city in motion. It's home to the Reynolds-Alberta Museum, which is an Alberta jewel. It celebrates Alberta's rural history and also has one of the largest aircraft exhibits in Canada. It also is home to Canada's Aviation Hall of Fame, and we have great hopes for that hall of fame. We have some initiatives where we're going to try to build that into an even bigger tourist attraction. It celebrates the human history of flight in Canada. Wetaskiwin is also the host to an air show every summer, and there's one coming up this summer. Then there's the Alberta Central Railway Museum. And as you all know, cars cost less in Wetaskiwin.

8:30

Besides transportation, though, it's also known for its historical buildings. It's well known for having the oldest working water tower in Canada, and its old courthouse, which was built in 1907, which was actually the second courthouse built in Alberta, is still in use. It's been refurbished and is part of a wonderful new city hall complex. So as you can see, there's lots of potential, as I mentioned, for people to have reason to go to Wetaskiwin.

Just up the road this way towards Edmonton is Millet, a beautiful little town which is a short drive from the International Airport and from Edmonton. It's very well situated for those who enjoy a more intimate, small-town life while maybe working away. It's well known for its flowers, lovely shops, and historical buildings as well.

Speaking of beautiful, there's Camrose at the east end of the constituency: a picturesque city centre with a lake and swans. It's a real business hub. It's a commerce centre, with business coming all the way from Saskatchewan. Few cities of that size can boast having a university, but Camrose does. Actually, other than the University of Alberta I think it's the oldest in the province. It was started in 1911 as Camrose Lutheran College, and with the help of this government it merged to become a faculty of the University of Alberta in 2003. It's a great asset for postsecondary education for rural students in Alberta.

We're waiting for the completion of a new library on the Augustana campus, which is going to be a great boon to that campus. Also, the greater Camrose community and Augustana are awaiting the new performing arts centre which is going to be built there, again with the help of this government. There is also a revitalized historical downtown theatre, which is going to do a lot to enhance cultural opportunities in Camrose. In terms of big events you've probably all heard of the Big Valley Jamboree – that's one of only many – and again you're all invited.

As host of the Viking Cup Camrose developed a great international reputation as a first-class host community, and that tradition continues as well. As upcoming events just within this year, this fall is the World Junior A Challenge in hockey and also the Continental Cup of Curling. Those two events are going to take place in the new Edgeworth Centre in Camrose, another great asset which is the envy of many communities of the size of Camrose.

As you can see, sir, there's lots of good happening in my constituency, but at times it feels like, with all of the development, it's going at a breakneck speed, and that does have some negatives with it. There are some challenges, and it's not just the two cities that are experiencing these challenges. For example, the two counties also have to deal with challenges to the farming community and the pressures on development in terms of recreational land development and industrial land development. I've heard lots in my recent time out there on the campaign trail about challenges in terms of infrastructure, environment, health care, long-term care beds, affordable housing, land use, education, and so on. The list goes on and on, but with this government's help and the excellent, forward-thinking municipal councils, I'm very confident, sir, that we can progress in a very positive fashion.

There's something about the balance of my constituency that I'd like to talk about a little bit because I think it's a bit of a microcosm of what Alberta is. Many would think of my constituency as a rural constituency, yet most of the people in it are in the two cities. If I'm not mistaken, it is the only constituency in Alberta that has two cities. The areas outside the two cities represent what is the essence of Alberta, what has been the essence of Alberta since before 1905, and that's big skies, farms, fresh air, good neighbours, all qualities that we want to preserve. The two cities represent our increasingly cosmopolitan nature: commerce, universities, museums, also things that we want to preserve.

Now, when I embarked on my political campaign, I decided to try to enunciate a vision, and here it is. My vision for Wetaskiwin-Camrose is for it to be a safe place to live with a prosperous, diversified economy, known for its clean environment, its excellence in health care, education, recreation, the arts, and for its community programs and facilities. I want people from every part of the constituency to think of themselves as belonging to one vibrant,

thriving, and caring community. It strikes me, Mr. Speaker, that one could easily apply the same vision for the whole province. One thing is clear, though, both for my constituency and for the province, and that is that the rural and the urban elements must rely upon each other. The advancement of one to the detriment of the other will be to the detriment of us all, and what is good for one is ultimately good for all of us.

I'm heartened, sir, by the co-operation I've seen in my constituency. I note that, for example, the city and the county of Camrose are collaborating to provide water to Ohaton to the east. Likewise, the city of Wetaskiwin and the county of Wetaskiwin, led by the county, are providing water to the hamlet of Gwynne. Bittern Lake has led by example in supporting financially the construction of the Edgeworth Centre in Camrose. Then we have JEDI, not the kind that you might think about, not the *Star Wars* kind. JEDI stands for joint economic development initiative, which is a partnership of the city of Wetaskiwin, the county of Wetaskiwin, and the town of Millet. These three municipalities have come together to stimulate economic development using a model which has become a prototype. They've been contacted by numerous other communities who are interested in seeing what they're doing.

That's my constituency. Now, sir, I'll tell you a little bit about myself and why I'm here. I've always been keenly interested in history, and what better place for a history buff to work than in a Legislature like this. The roots of my family are deep in the Alberta soil. Both of my parents were born here, children of immigrant farmers who originally came from Norway. In fact, both of my parents were Olsons. My mom was an e-n Olsen, and she married an o-n Olson, no relation. My grandfather, my father's father, Ole Olson, was born in the back of a covered wagon somewhere between North Dakota and here. Interestingly, his twin brother, John Olson, is the great-grandfather of the hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater. Walking through this building has a special meaning for me because my mother's father, Lind Olsen, came here from Norway in 1907, couldn't speak English, and one of the first jobs he had was working on the construction of this building. So it's moving for me to walk through this building, and I sometimes wonder if I'm not literally walking in my grandfather's footsteps.

I feel very strongly, sir, that my generation is the beneficiary of the Alberta that has been built by our parents and our grandparents, by their optimism, their determination, community spirit, vision, and work ethic. I see the furtherance of what they started as a sacred trust that we all have a duty to preserve. But it wasn't just our ancestors who have displayed these qualities in order to build Alberta. I noted with interest this afternoon that the Minister of Finance and Enterprise in her budget speech made reference to "the arrival of new pioneers every day." Those were her words. I've been inspired by the stories of those people who continue to arrive here. We meet these people in our communities every day, and we've even heard some of their stories in this Chamber in recent days. They're inspiring. They exemplify the same qualities as those of our ancestors.

Finally, I'm touched and inspired and humbled by the story of our First Nations, those whose ancestors were here long before any of ours were. There is no one who cares more about the land that we inhabit here. Their history is rich and proud, but it's also sad and tragic, at least in part because of the European immigration, which is so important to our stories. It reinforces for me that our histories are forever intertwined, as are our futures.

8:40

Sir, as you know, there are two First Nations in my constituency, Samson and Montana, and you also know that there have been tragic

events there recently involving gangs and drugs and violence. Sometimes it feels as though there's just no good news that comes from those places, but I want to tell you and my colleagues that there is good news and there's great potential. Of course, many issues have to be dealt with, and for a lot of those issues the solutions have to come from within those communities and also from our federal counterparts, but we have to be ready to help when it's appropriate and when we're asked.

We also have to be ready to recognize and celebrate the wonderful good stories which come from there. To that end, sir, within the coming days I'm going to distribute to all of my colleagues here a documentary film made about the cadet program at Hobbema. That's a program that's deserving of our support. I believe that Hobbema is a community that has maybe the greatest untapped potential in Alberta.

The Acting Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a) the hon. minister of advanced education.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was listening very closely to a number of the very interesting vignettes of the hon. member's history, and I noted he was about to tell us a little bit about some of the untapped potential. I wonder if he might continue.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Olson: My thanks. As a lawyer I found often that I take more words than I probably should, and I have some good stuff left.

I just want to talk about the untapped potential of these beautiful, talented young people at Hobbema. They hunger for a better life, and we need to help them find that bright future.

We only arrive here, sir, if our constituents send us, and they have certain expectations of us. My commitment to my constituents was to be accessible, a careful listener, to treat everybody with respect and dignity, and to be an effective advocate. I think that my constituents want to see positive improvements, and I'm happy to see that in the throne speech the five priorities that are set out there are the same ones that are enunciated by my constituents when I talk to them. I look forward to the days ahead and exchanging ideas as to how we will achieve those things. I've said often that if we're going to wait for the 83 of us here to come up with all of the good ideas, we may be in trouble, so I look forward to also hearing from our constituents, the people who live on the front lines, and taking their ideas and putting them into practice.

I have one final comment, sir, in terms of expectations: my constituents want me to behave. I'd like to tell a story about a grade 6 class I talked to last week. One of the questions I got from them was: is it really true that sometimes in the Legislature people don't listen to each other and heckle each other and so on? That was also reinforced for me by other adult constituents. It just made me think that if we don't respect each other, then our constituents and Albertans won't respect us. I think that the way we behave impacts on people's attitudes towards us and towards politics. Maybe that's naive, but as a new member not yet used to the adversarial nature of this place, my commitment is to treat all of my colleagues with the respect they deserve by virtue of them having been elected by Albertans, so I look forward to working with everybody.

Thank you, sir.

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

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, thank you. It's just a treat to ask a

lawyer a question without paying \$65. I wonder if the hon. member might enlighten us on the numbers of the cadets in that tremendously successful cadet program on the reserve.

Mr. Olson: This program started a little over two years ago. They thought they may have, you know, a hundred kids. At last count I heard somewhere between 900 and approaching a thousand. They're working on a Guinness world record that'll maybe be recognized this summer. What they need as much as money is people to help, and I've been working on a few initiatives to get some people there. Think of yourself as a ball coach who might have to coach 20 kids. Now think of yourself as a volunteer RCMP officer who shows up in the evening to have 300 kids come. What do you do to keep them interested? I'm just swept off my feet by the success of that program, and it's thanks to some really committed RCMP people and community volunteers.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to have this opportunity to participate in the debate this evening on the throne speech that was delivered on April 15, 2008, by His Honour. It's always a pleasure to see His Honour and Mrs. Kwong enter the Legislative Assembly.

Before I get into the details of the Speech from the Throne today and tomorrow, I too would like on behalf of the constituents of Edmonton-Gold Bar to congratulate each and every hon. member of this Assembly for their election victory on March 3. Certainly, the more diverse the opinions are in this Chamber, I think the better government we will have.

I also would like to thank the constituents of Edmonton-Gold Bar for their solid endorsement. It was a unique campaign, to say the least. I certainly am looking forward to debate and discussion on many public issues in this Assembly over the next couple of years.

I was astonished that the Conservatives in my neighbourhood were unwilling to have public debates on the issues that many constituents had questions about. Now, the questions that were discussed in our constituency were, certainly, power bills, the direction that this government should go regarding public education, the direction we should go regarding public health care, seniors' care, how our roads and bridges have been maintained. We seem to be spending more and more money, but there doesn't seem to be a dramatic increase in the condition of our bridges, our roads, our public schools, our public hospitals. People were asking the question: where is the money going? Perhaps the Conservative candidate either didn't have the answer or didn't want to provide the answer. Perhaps the Conservative candidate didn't want to admit that if the Conservatives got this very large majority, which they did, they would implement private health care.

Now, in the throne speech, Mr. Speaker, if we look at this carefully, we will see where there's mention of health care, but this throne speech is very selective in where the word "public" is placed in the paragraphs and in the sentences. In fact, one of the headlines here is "Action to Sustain Alberta's Health System." Hopefully through the course of the next couple of years it will be determined if the omission of the word "public" was inadvertent or not, but this simply reads, "Action to Sustain Alberta's Health System." The removal of the word "public" could be very important.

There was no discussion during the campaign on the direction that this huge majority wanted to go. Certainly, we brought it up. Seniors – and there are a lot of seniors in our constituency – had concerns. They had questions.

8:50

In fact, one evening I had a discussion with a group of seniors who, incredibly, had been bused to the Progressive Conservative leadership vote. The bus came one weekend and then back the next weekend to pick them up. They were asking me questions about long-term care, and I just happened to have the Auditor General's report with me on the long-term care facilities in this province going back two years. I was reading from this report. Some of the Conservatives in attendance challenged me on what I was reading and what the Auditor General had said. I showed them the Auditor General's report. They were astonished, Mr. Speaker, to read this. They had not heard about this.

In fact, one person, named Gloria, asked me how many copies of the AG's report I had. I only had one, unfortunately, but I left it with her, and she promised that she would share it with the rest of the people in the facility. I thought, for interest, that I'd look a couple of days after the polling and see how I did in that facility. We carried it. We carried it. Our campaign was fortunate. But seniors are looking for information on how this government is managing our long-term care programs and our facilities, and they're very keen to get more information. That's why the citizens in our community will be following how we proceed with this whole debate of private versus public health care.

Now, the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo spoke about public education and the dramatic increase in private schools and private school funding. That was an issue with parents in our community as well, as was the future role of public schools in mature neighbourhoods and the direction we will go. They're puzzled as to why we can spend money frivolously – I can't even say that word – on things like horse-racing renewal, yet we use the argument at a public meeting that we've got to save \$235,000, so we're going to close a community school. There's a disconnect with the parents here.

If you look at our community, which starts in Ottewell at 90th Avenue and goes north to the other side of the river, to Commonwealth Stadium, it's a diverse community. It takes in many different neighbourhoods with different incomes, with different issues. But they all have one thing in common; that is, they want us to spend their tax dollars wisely.

Now, another issue that came up – and this one was also puzzling for the constituents, and I can understand why the Conservatives would avoid public debate on this issue – is the issue of royalties. Just before the election started, there was a document from the Department of Energy left in the Environmental Law Centre library – this was the government of Alberta's own document – which clearly indicated that we had not been for some time collecting our fair share on an annual basis in royalties. We all know now, Mr. Speaker, that oil prices are rising. They're in the range of \$115 to \$120 a barrel. The \$120 range is going to be interesting. We have exchange rates to consider whenever we talk about oil royalties. We have terrorist attacks in foreign lands. We have market speculation to deal with. These are all factors in the historically high prices that we're seeing these days.

There's a growing demand for oil from developing countries like China and India and from mature market economies, as well, like the United States of America. Where will we get all this oil in the future that we need to fuel our economies? Well, Alberta is one source. The North Sea and Alaska are two areas that produce significant amounts of oil, but their production levels are in a steady rate of decline. Russia's oil production is also peaking, Mr. Speaker. Nigeria has many issues. In fact, just this week there were reports in the international media of gangs attacking oil production facilities and destabilizing the production facilities and the government there. Mexico, a big supplier to America, is involved in an internal

discussion over foreign investment in its oil patch. Major oil companies are having difficulty competing with national oil companies. In fact, 14 of the world's top 20 oil companies are state-owned giants, like Saudi Aramco and Russia's Gazprom.

Now, that leaves western oil companies like EnCana – and when I'm talking about western, I'm not talking about western Canada. I'm talking about our western hemisphere. You have Mobil. You have BP. You have Chevron. You have Exxon. These companies are in control of less than 10 per cent of the world's oil and gas reserves. We always welcome these companies – and I hope we continue to do so – to do business in Alberta. But when the threats are made, if we increase royalties to a competitive level with other jurisdictions in North America, I don't think these companies are sincere in their pledge or their insistence that they're going to load everything up on a highboy and head to Texas. It's not going to happen because there are so few places, Mr. Speaker, for them to go now because of these state-owned giants. Alberta is a very good place to do business. If we are to continue to spend as much money as this current government is doing, we're going to have to make sure that our nonrenewable resource royalty revenue continues to come in to the treasury, and we're also going to have to make a commitment to save a portion of that.

Now, there were a lot of good Alberta Liberal ideas in that budget today. Finally we see an elimination of health care premiums. We see some modest commitments to ease the burden of student loans for Alberta students. We see a commitment to improve the river valley. These are all Alberta Liberal ideas, but the most important idea – and I really hope the President of the Treasury Board makes a genuine commitment – is to save a bit more. I know there are parts of that Conservative caucus that want to make sure the slot is never covered in the piggy bank, but I want the Treasury Board president to ensure that the slot in the piggy bank is large and that there's a lot of money put in there and that it's saved for future generations.

We have seen this government expand. I was listening to the budget speech today, Mr. Speaker, and I thought: my, is it time to go on a diet; \$37 billion. Now, the throne speech doesn't mention anything that I can see that would show a flag or a concern regarding government spending, but we're going to have to look at this sooner or later, and hopefully we're going to look at this sooner. The Alberta Liberal idea of saving a few dollars now for the future is a good one, and I would certainly encourage the hon. members across the way to give that serious consideration.

For new members of this Assembly, it took a while for the sustainability fund, or the stabilization fund, whatever you want to call it. We asked and we asked and we asked, and finally the government agreed, and now we have the sustainability fund. I'm sure the Minister of Transportation is going to be looking for some extra sanding trucks and some snowplows, and he might have to reach into that fund to facilitate the purchase of those machines to make our roads and our highways safe regardless of the weather conditions because we all know the weather in Alberta can change.

9:00

Now, Mr. Speaker, when we look at the throne speech and we look at building strong, safe communities, we look at sustainable resource development, we look at Alberta's infrastructure – I mentioned earlier about our public health care system and our public education system, our economy – let's hope that this plan works out for the benefit of all Albertans.

The Acting Speaker: Section 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would wonder if the hon. member would blame the content of his speech on the educa-

tion system or the sound system or their ability to have total irrelevance to the subject we're talking about or what might be driving the focus of his speech in response to the throne speech. Most of it is incorrect, irrelevant, and uninteresting.

Mr. MacDonald: That is, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member's opinion. As I said earlier and if he had been listening, we would have discussed the fact that every opinion should be valued in this Assembly, and I would urge him to take heed of the advice of the hon. Member for Camrose-Wetaskiwin.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. minister of advanced education.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Having listened attentively to the hon. member's long speech, I do have two questions, one going to the first part of your speech, hon. member. You mentioned a constituency and a poll number that you won that was out in the rural area. I'm wondering if you could tell us which constituency and which poll number that was. I'd like to look at that.

The other question I had. The hon. member noted a dramatic – and I think the word, Mr. Speaker, was “dramatic” – increase in private school funding last year, and I'm just wondering what that percentage was. I don't recall that.

The member has a tremendous ability, as our Premier says, to predict the past and to claim all the ideas as being his own. But I just wonder if the hon. member might answer those two questions for me.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If the hon. member's hearing was as keen as his imagination, he would be better off because certainly I did not say that. The poll that I had referred to was in Edmonton-Gold Bar. It wasn't in a rural area. It was a facility within the community. [Interjection] No, hon. member, there were many Conservative candidates. There was only one who was successful, but there were many in the campaign. They were all operating throughout the city of Edmonton to sell memberships and get those folks out to vote.

Mr. Horner: So it wasn't a rural riding.

Mr. MacDonald: It was not a rural riding.

I can understand where the hon. member is coming from with that question after I had a look at the Auditor General's report from last week. Certainly, if the hon. member is not going to listen to what I have to say, I hope he will listen to what the Auditor General has to say and fix up some of the mistakes that are going on in your own department regarding community colleges, NAIT, SAIT. You have a lot of work to do, hon. member, and if you're not going to listen to what I have to say, please look after the affairs of your department.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will certainly take those comments to heart as we have accepted all of the recommendations of the Auditor General. If the hon. member had been paying attention, he would have known that as well. But he didn't answer my second question about the private school funding. I do believe you did say “dramatic increase,” hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes, Mr. Speaker, there has been a dramatic increase, and I will provide you a breakdown. I'm surprised that you don't have it. I will respond in the same way as the hon. minister for tourism, parks, and culture did in question period today. I will provide it to you, and I will give you a breakdown of the difference between private school funding and private schools in Edmonton and Calgary. Again, I'm very surprised that you don't have those numbers already at your fingertips. It clearly is another indication to me that you're having difficulty handling that big portfolio.

The Acting Speaker: If there are no others, the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Sorry. This is to the member. I just had a quick question, Mr. Speaker, about the member's comments on private schooling. I represent the constituency of Airdrie-Chestermere, and in that constituency we have a school, Airdrie Koinonia Christian school. My children do not attend that school, but I have many friends and constituents that do attend that school. The Fraser Institute puts out an annual report ranking schools, and that one has been one of the top schools in Alberta for several years now. Also, in another part of my constituency there is a school called, I think it is, the Prince of Peace . . .

The Acting Speaker: Could you get to the question? We're just about out of time.

Mr. Anderson: Absolutely. The question is: what is it about private schools that is failing the students that are in those classrooms right now?

The Acting Speaker: Time has expired.

The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Jacobs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is certainly a privilege and an honour to rise on this occasion and speak to this distinguished Assembly. First, let me congratulate you, Mr. Speaker, on your election as Deputy Chair of Committees. I have the highest confidence in the manner that you will handle your responsibilities. I also wish to congratulate all my colleagues in this Assembly on their re-election or election and for their willingness and commitment to serve the people of Alberta. May I also congratulate our Premier on his election and acknowledge his leadership in putting Alberta in the enviable position it is in today. I thank him for the positive leadership that he has provided.

Mr. Speaker, as the new Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner I am pleased and grateful to be here today. I am privileged to represent a very interesting constituency. Many of my colleagues have said that theirs is the best, which, of course, is debatable. But what I can truthfully say is that Cardston-Taber-Warner is the most southwesterly and maybe, well, one of the most scenic. It includes Waterton Lakes national park on the west, the towns of Cardston and Milk River to the east, and Warner, Raymond, Stirling, Magrath, and Taber in between. It also includes all of Cardston county, the county of Warner, and most of the MD of Taber.

Agriculture is the mainstay of the area, but natural gas and oil production have been increasing. Agriculture consists of ranching in the foothills, grain and oilseed farming on the prairies, and irrigated crops of sugar beets, potatoes, vegetables, corn, hay, and specialty crops as well. The production from these farms and

ranches is the backbone of the huge, intensive livestock industry that has developed in the south and also provides the production necessary for the value-added industry that is developing in this area. These industries, in turn, provide employment for many people and provide much economic benefit not only to our local economy but to all of Alberta.

Although our farmers and ranchers are industrious and independent, they have been challenged in the past years by severe drought conditions, low grain and commodity prices, high energy costs, and BSE. The family farm, which has done a remarkable job of providing food for Albertans at a very low percentage of their disposable income, is under severe stress. When one considers that consumers in this province approximately work on average only 40 days a year to buy their food and that about 10 days of that work goes directly to the producer, one has to admit that farmers and ranchers, most of which are family farms, have been very efficient in producing good, quality food for all of us.

The tragedy of this situation is that many of these family farms may not survive because of the aforementioned factors of low commodity prices, high energy costs, drought, and the effects of BSE. I believe it would serve all consumers well to help maintain the viability of our agriculture industry and to ensure that the family farm remains economically viable. I was pleased, therefore, that the Speech from the Throne noted that the government will continue to recognize the importance of vibrant rural communities and competitive agriculture sectors as well as that the government will continue to work with the agriculture sectors to strengthen and diversify the entire economy.

9:10

I would also like to acknowledge, Mr. Speaker, the great contribution of our rural communities – our towns, villages, counties, and MDs – to the economic well-being of Alberta. These communities are very dependent on a strong agriculture economy for their well-being. Many small businesses in these communities are struggling, and many have closed. Not only are they suffering because of the problems in agriculture, but the sudden massive increase in energy costs is presenting them with a huge challenge. Although most are grateful for the government rebate programs to assist them, most have still experienced significant increases in their energy bills and other bills. Rural communities are vibrant and viable. As this government proceeds, I'm looking forward to the commitment to these communities.

Health care, Mr. Speaker, is a challenge in my constituency, as it is in many others across this province. Rural communities face added health care challenges. Many people in Cardston-Taber-Warner live long distances from rural hospitals and much further from large regional hospitals. Doctors, nurses, and health care workers work long and hard to provide quality care. However, it is a challenge to keep doctors and nurses in many of these small rural communities. I applaud the government's commitment to strengthen Alberta's publicly funded health system as well as the commitment to improve the overall efficiency and effectiveness of the health system. The innovative approaches committed to in the throne speech will ensure that Alberta has the health care professionals it needs to meet current and future demands.

Family and traditional values are very important to the people of Cardston-Taber-Warner. People in my constituency work hard to support families and communities. They support and help one another to improve schools, churches, and hospitals. These are a people known for their voluntary community service and charitable support for one another. I was pleased to see the throne speech reinforce the values and priorities of these hard-working Albertans,

such as entrepreneurship, self-reliance, compassion, and putting others' needs ahead of one's own. These are the values, Mr. Speaker, that have made Alberta what it is today.

I believe that government should be open and responsible. I believe that the rights to life and property are truly inalienable rights and that government exists to benefit people. There is truth in the adage that the best government is that which governs least. I know that my constituents are appreciative of the efforts the government has made over the past years in debt and tax reduction. They want us to continue this effort until their taxes are as low as possible and for us to continue to be fiscally responsible. They want us to be sensitive and responsive to the challenges being faced by rural Albertans and to be innovative in creating safe communities in which to raise their children.

Alberta, Mr. Speaker, is a blessed province. It has great resources and good, hard-working people. Those who have gone before us have left us a great legacy. Our challenge is to move forward, to preserve these qualities of thrift, hard work, and traditional family values that got us here, and to be innovative and forward thinking to successfully meet the challenges of the future.

In conclusion, may I say, Mr. Speaker, that it is truly a humbling experience and an honour to have been elected to this position by my constituents. I thank them for the trust they have vested in me and pledge to them my commitment to undertake that trust. I also appreciate the kindness and friendliness that has been shown to me by my colleagues and workers in this Assembly. I look forward to working co-operatively with my colleagues and fulfilling our promise to successfully meet the challenges ahead. May God bless Alberta and its people.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Section 29(2)(a) is available for anyone who wishes to speak and ask questions.

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour for me to rise today in the Legislature for the first time to speak on behalf of the constituents of Drayton Valley-Calmar in response to the throne speech. I want to congratulate you on your election. I also want to take this opportunity to congratulate all members for being elected. All members of this Assembly should be very proud of the work done and the sacrifices made in order to be here today. It is both an honour and a privilege to serve the people of Alberta, and I look forward to working with each and every one of you over the course of our mandate.

Mr. Speaker, I am standing here today as the very proud newly elected Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, and I am so pleased to recognize the contributions of my predecessors. Their hard work and dedication to the people of my constituency certainly deserves recognition and gratitude. Especially, I want to recognize the following three MLAs I have known and worked with over my 17 years in politics: Mrs. Shirley Cripps, Mr. Tom Thurber, and most recently, Reverend Tony Abbott.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my family for their support. I truly appreciate the sacrifice they have made and the ones I know they will continue to make as I work to serve the people of my constituency who have placed their trust in me. I have such wonderful support from my husband, Jim, and our four amazing daughters: Kristen, Jacqueline, Melissa, and Courtney. I am able to serve my province, our province, because of the dedication they have to public service as well. Our children have grown up with their mom and their dad, who was also a school board trustee, in

public life, so they have come to know the importance of servant leadership.

I also want to thank my extended family. I am the youngest of eight children, and my parents, Mary and Knut Kjorlien, were both immigrants to Canada. My father came to Alberta as a teenager from Norway with his brother Tom to be part of this wonderful province. After a few short years in Canada Dad then went to war for our country, and it was in England during World War II where, as a young handsome soldier, he met my beautiful mother, Mary O'Connor, a nurse from Ireland working in England during the war. As with many war brides my mother came to join my father after the war to begin their life together and to help build our community in Drayton Valley and our province. My parents, like many of yours, are the true pioneers who have made this province such an amazing place for us to live, work, and to raise our families. To my parents and to all who have built this province: I salute you, and I thank you.

My father has since passed on, but I feel him and my mother with me many times. Their wisdom, values, and guidance still ring true in my daily life. Mr. Speaker, with your acceptance I dedicate this maiden speech to my husband, Jim, our children, and to my parents for all they have done to help me along the way.

I also want to recognize the hard work of my campaign team and volunteers, who were so dedicated to helping and supporting me and worked tirelessly in my bid for the Legislature. I have been overwhelmed and humbled by the outpouring of support from so many in our constituency and, indeed, across the province.

In this my first opportunity to address the Legislative Assembly, I would like to provide a little background information about the very special and beautiful constituency of Drayton Valley-Calmar. I am blessed to have such an amazing, diverse area to serve. We have the beautiful lakes, river valley, provincial parks and recreation areas, and many arts and recreation centres and activities. Like many other regions in Alberta my riding supports extremely diverse economic sectors. Agriculture, oil and gas, mining, forestry, retail trade, tourism, professionals, and the service industry are all integral components of the economy in Drayton Valley-Calmar. We also have many communities, which include towns, counties, villages, and summer villages, and I am very proud to say that we're also very fortunate to have the Ermineskin, Louis Bull, and parts of the Buck Lake reserves located in my constituency.

There are approximately 30,000 residents in Drayton Valley-Calmar with diverse backgrounds and occupations. The people of Drayton Valley-Calmar are very hard-working, persevering people who want to do the best they can to provide for their families. These are people who are willing to contribute to the betterment of their communities, and they have the true Alberta can-do attitude. They truly are also amazing volunteers who pull together for the betterment of all.

9:20

Mr. Speaker, my interest in politics started at a very young age with my father discussing quite often passionately the issues and policies – and I will age myself a bit here – of Mr. Stanfield and Mr. Trudeau. My father being a very strong Conservative, you can imagine the lively debates around the table when friends visited, and I always loved to listen and be involved in the debates. My older brother, Tim Kjorlien, who was also an elected official and chaired our local school board for many years, was the person, however, who first convinced me to run for office as, in his words, he saw in me the gifts and skills needed in an elected official.

So started my 17 years to date in politics. I started as a school board trustee and then chaired the school board before moving on to

municipal politics. I served as a town councillor for six years before becoming mayor of Drayton Valley. I do believe my background gives me a special understanding of municipal and community issues and will enable me to have a great working relationship with communities that compose Drayton Valley-Calmar and, of course, our province.

Mr. Speaker, as you and all members know, the Lieutenant Governor of Alberta delivered the Speech from the Throne on April 15. Outlined in this speech were the five priorities that our Premier and, indeed, all of the government caucus will work hard to achieve. We will focus on increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of the delivery of health care services within the Canada Health Act, as Albertans told us at the doors. I know the people of my riding want a health care system that continues to be there for them and their loved ones when they need it. Albertans deserve and expect the best possible health care services that can be provided. It will be our job to deliver, and I am confident that we will.

The continued growth and prosperity of our province has presented us with unique opportunities and challenges. Our 20-year capital plan will ensure that we keep up with the demands that our ever-increasing population has placed and will continue to place on our infrastructure.

All Albertans and, indeed, all Canadians have expressed time and time again the importance of safe communities. I spent a great deal of time leading safe communities initiatives. I am proud of our entire team as these initiatives have proven great results, and I look forward to sharing those with my colleagues so that we can learn from each other and make our communities safer. We also need to continue to address the root causes of crime and to be proactive in our approach to crime prevention.

As a resident of rural Alberta and growing up on our family farm, I understand the strains put upon our agriculture sector. We know that the beef industry and other agriculture sectors are struggling, and we need to find ways to work with our farmers and producers to deal with the short- and long-term solutions to this problem. We need a strong, vibrant agriculture industry, and I'm committed to working with my government and the agriculture industry to find solutions and to implement them.

An issue that has become increasingly important and is at the forefront of national and global media is the state of the environment. I can tell you that this was a great issue in my election, and I was very proud to be able to share with my constituents our Premier's commitment to finding the balance between environmental stewardship and economic development and creating a made-in-Alberta solution. That being said, Mr. Speaker, with my Norwegian ancestry I will be looking to Norway and to other world leaders for examples of excellence that can be modelled into a made-in-Alberta solution. Perhaps that will be part of my father's legacy for coming to Alberta.

I thank hon. Premier Stelmach for entrusting the position of parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Environment to my care. I understand the issues and the grave responsibility of this portfolio, and I am privileged and honoured to be working with the hon. Minister of Environment. We have been blessed with such a diverse and naturally breathtaking province, and it is our duty to leave it in a better place than we started for our children and grandchildren.

Another issue I heard about time and again when I was door-knocking during the campaign was the importance of quality education and postsecondary education. Living in rural Alberta presents a unique series of problems for our youth. In order for our rural areas to thrive and be sustainable, we depend on the energy and vitality of our youth. Rural consortiums have become increasingly popular over the last number of years, enabling students and adults

to take courses on satellite campuses. Mr. Speaker, this is the way of the future, and we need to grow and expand the consortiums. In my area the Pembina Educational Consortium is a living example of excellence that continues to grow and evolve to meet the ever-changing needs of the citizens of Drayton Valley-Calmar.

The forest industry continues to be experiencing many challenges, and it is no different in my constituency. The Weyerhaeuser OSB mill in Drayton Valley curtailed its operations last December. We need to work with communities and the forest industry to find innovative solutions and to help these communities be sustainable. There are many opportunities that we can look at, and I will be a strong advocate for innovation in the forest industry and sustainable communities.

Mr. Speaker, many of the seniors I have spoken with are concerned about the rising cost of living while they are still living on a fixed income. Our government understands that seniors built this province and have made it as great as it is today, and we need to remember their contributions and to help them age in their place of choice by supporting them to do so.

I am incredibly proud to be from Alberta and to be standing in the same Legislature to follow the footsteps of other women who have made their province proud. In my constituency alone I have been preceded by my dear friend and wonderful mentor, Mrs. Shirley Cripps, and Mrs. Cornelia Wood. Both these women were very hardworking and dedicated MLAs. While we were campaigning, Mrs. Cripps told me stories of how Mrs. Wood would ride her horse from Stony Plain to Drayton Valley to meet with her constituents. Now, that is dedication. Both Shirley and Cornelia are such wonderful examples to me and to all women of the true dedication and spirit of public service at its finest.

I'm also very proud to say that Alberta has always been very progressive. In fact, Louise McKinney and Roberta McAdams were first elected to the Alberta Legislature in 1917, the first election where women were allowed to vote and run for political office. Women faced a great deal of criticism at the time for entering into politics, but Mrs. McKinney quickly became known as one of the most capable debaters in the Assembly and, really, a mentor for many men and women to follow. I am inspired by the words of the late Mrs. McKinney. She called on women "to dream big and act honourably" and strongly believed that "the purpose of a woman's life is just the same as the purpose of a man's life – that she may make the best possible contribution to the generation in which she is living."

Mr. Speaker, I know that with the trust Albertans have placed in us, it will be all of our collective responsibility to think big and to act honourably as we plan with Albertans where we want Alberta to be now and in the future. We are the leaders of today that will shape the future of tomorrow. I am honoured and excited to be part of this team and grateful to the people of Drayton Valley-Calmar that they have entrusted me to represent them as their Member of the Legislative Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Section 29(2)(a) is open for anyone who wishes to ask a question, make a comment.

Hearing none, the hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a privilege for me to rise in this Legislature as the member representing the constituency of Calgary-Mackay. I would like to extend my sincere congratulations to you for your win to become the Deputy Chair of Committees, and I would also like to congratulate my colleagues in this House for their successful campaigns.

Mr. Speaker, Calgary-Mackay is one of the fastest growing young ridings in the city of Calgary, with 40 per cent of the communities in this riding established within the last 18 years and about 50 per cent of the communities built just within the past 10. We can see the diversity of this riding's demographics mirrored in the diversity of the members of this House. About 45 per cent of the Calgary-Mackay constituents were born in Alberta, with 2 per cent comprised of members of our First Nations, and over 30 per cent are immigrants. In fact, Chinese is the second most spoken language in Calgary-Mackay. The riding's demographic makeup is indeed a microcosm of many of our province's major urban centres.

This evolving young riding also has many young residents. About 55 per cent of the households within Calgary-Mackay are families with children. In fact, children and youth under 19 make up about 30 per cent of the riding's population. So for this constituency, Mr. Speaker, education, accessible health services, transportation, and affordable housing are key concerns that were reiterated to me many times over when I was speaking to the residents of this constituency during the election campaign.

9:30

The importance of social infrastructure development was also strongly communicated by the citizens of Calgary-Mackay. I was excited and encouraged by the expressed desire of these individuals to participate in civic society. To that end, I'm working with an energetic team of people to get ready to launch our interactive website and community outreach plan in the next three to six months.

Even though it's a young riding, it is very much part of the ongoing dynamic development within the city of Calgary. Calgary-Mackay is preceded by the constituencies of Calgary-McKnight and Calgary-Nose Creek, dating back to 1972, the year I immigrated to Canada and Alberta. Mr. Speaker, the communities within these evolutionary boundaries have been home to four generations of my family for the past 36 years.

These communities hold some very special moments for my family. My father met my grandfather for the first time at the age of 41 upon our arrival in Calgary, and my mother's family had their first family reunion in 25 years when my family arrived in Alberta. I learned English and had my first job in this riding, and it's where my children were born and raised. This is the riding where I served as public school board trustee, the first immigrant woman ever to be elected trustee in Calgary and now the first woman of Chinese descent elected to the Legislative Assembly of Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, 2008 marks the 150th year of the participation and contribution of Chinese Canadians. It also marks the 150th year of struggle towards full citizenship for Albertans and Canadians of Chinese descent. We have come a long way from official exclusion to having the hon. Henry Woo elected to the Legislature more than three decades ago and the former MLA for Calgary-Mackay, the talented and honourable Gary Mar, who was one of the youngest members elected to the Alberta Legislature and the youngest cabinet minister.

Mr. Speaker, I take on the role of a Member of the Legislative Assembly with pride and a strong sense of responsibility. I'm indebted to the men and women from a full spectrum of society who guided me, encouraged me, and supported me to earn the honour to serve the people. I'd like to especially mention my husband, who has been a great supporter of my campaign and getting me here, my children, my parents, and my dedicated team of campaign volunteers.

Mr. Speaker, my journey to this Legislature is rooted in my faith

in people, my commitment to community development and engagement, and my belief in making a difference. I felt compelled by a strong desire to provide a voice, particularly for those who feel they are without one, and to live up to my belief in full democratic civic participation.

As a social worker with over 30 years of community volunteer involvement, I have learned first-hand the spectrum of support services our province has in place, but I have also learned that there is a need to ensure equitable access to human services for people of all ages, incomes, education levels, and cultural backgrounds. Indeed, the voluntary sector is one of the key human services that play an integral role in contributing to a superb quality of life. It has evolved to become a third pillar supporting the growth and development of our dynamic province, along with the public and private sectors.

The women and men in this sector work tirelessly to manage and sustain organizations and human resources, both professionals and volunteers, to support victims of child abuse, families in conflict, people with terminal illnesses, and many other issues. This sector also includes the arts, sports, culture, and educational organizations. In order to continue to adequately support the well-being of Albertans in need, we need to acknowledge the roles and contributions this sector makes and recognize the challenges it is facing in fulfilling its mandates.

We have a tremendous opportunity to advance many social and community development goals under the leadership and direction of Premier Stelmach and build on the visionary accomplishments of those who came before him such as the Hon. Peter Lougheed, who believed in maximizing the number of our citizens controlling their own destiny. I share the government's desire to create the kind of quality of life that is second to none in Canada. This is very exciting to me, Mr. Speaker.

We have tremendous talent in our province and the opportunity to create and enhance our artistic expression with the continuous wave of people from all over the world. As someone who has been involved with the arts and cultural communities for over 25 years, I'm inspired to support the continued development of this essential sector in our province.

I'm immensely encouraged by the government's recognition that there's a need for Alberta to catch up in some areas, to close the gap in others, and in all cases to ensure that no one is left behind as the province moves forward.

Mr. Speaker, the citizens of Calgary-Mackay wish to live in communities where our children and youth are safe physically, socially, and emotionally, where families have equitable access to meaningful support with equitable service outcomes such as health services, where people's talents and skills are truly valued and fully utilized to the benefit of society as a whole, and where citizens share a great sense of belonging and ownership of their community because they recognize the humanity that we have in common as well as know our differences are respected and meaningfully included.

The throne speech clearly enshrined the government's commitment under the leadership of Premier Stelmach to creating and enhancing these safe, vibrant, and inclusive communities, and I'm proud to be part of the solution. I thank the citizens of Calgary-Mackay for their trust in me, and I thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak today.

I would now move that we adjourn debate of the Speech from the Throne.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading

Bill 5
Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2008
(continued)

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to get an opportunity to speak during second reading of the appropriation bill, Bill 5, which of course encompasses the estimates that are supplementary supply estimates which were in Committee of Supply debate on Monday evening. I didn't get a chance to speak then, so thank you very much for the opportunity now. I did read the *Hansard* from the other night just to make sure that I wasn't repeating questions that were asked, and I hope I've been a careful reader.

A couple of issues that I'd like to bring up or question. The payments under Education which were essentially to reach labour – what's the word we were using? – stability, labour certainty over, I think it was, a five-year period with the Alberta Teachers' Association in return for the government agreeing to fund the unfunded liability of the teachers' pension fund. Very interesting, but of course now we're starting to hear from a number of other labour groups. So I am wondering what other labour issues are now backed up on the back burner where the government is seeking some sort of long-term labour certainty versus what the labour unions or the new unions would like to see. What I'm looking for here is: what's the next one coming down the pipe? Because I'm wondering if anything would be offered, for example, to the labour unions that are seeking replacement worker legislation or first contract legislation, which is something that's been raised quite a bit. I'll look forward to a response in Committee of the Whole to that question.

9:40

My next question is around the Employment and Immigration department, and this one was very interesting. Essentially, what's being asked for here is a supplementary amount of money of \$14 million to cover an estimated additional \$21 million cost of income support programs due to increased caseloads, 800 cases more than were being budgeted for or anticipated. For the most part, that's 800 individuals, but it could be 800 families that are also involved there. What kind of analysis has the government done around where those 800 cases came from and why? This is coming through, for the most part – there was a 10 per cent increase in the learners section, but the largest increase was out of people expected to work or working and people not expected to work, so this is welfare. Well, what we knew as welfare. It's now called income support. So why do we have the 800 cases? What's the analysis on this? Where do they come from? Who are these people? What steps is the government taking now to make sure we don't have another 800 cases of people that are in dire need of income support from the government?

I do notice with a certain amount of exasperation that part of this is \$10 more per case than what was budgeted. I think the government was actually spending somewhere in the \$900 range. It was \$983 versus \$973, I think. I don't have quite the right numbers there, but, boy, that's not a heck of a lot of money to try and live on in Alberta in this day and age, when you're looking at rents for a pretty shabby basement suite, one-room studio, or a bachelor in the sort of \$500 to \$700 range. That's not a lot of money.

Also under Employment and Immigration and raised by another colleague of mine was the decrease in money for workplace safety. That one puzzles me as well. I did read the response to it, and I

don't think the response really addressed why the government chose to make that reduction. You know, we're coming up to the National Day of Mourning for workers who were injured or died in the workplace. I think in Alberta we have a high, to my mind, number of injuries and deaths. I think the injuries are three a month.

Mr. MacDonald: There would be three per week dying.

Ms Blakeman: Three per week. Three per week deaths from workplace injuries. That's very high, yet there has been a reduction in workplace safety? That just doesn't make sense to me, especially since our numbers are growing. When I was first elected here, we did not have three workers a week that were dying on work sites. Something's not working there, and I would like to hear more about what the government is doing to assess the risk there and how they're going to address it.

I was also looking under the explanation for the Environment appearing on page 26 of the supplementary supply estimates book. A one-time payment of \$3.7 million to the town of Strathmore for costs incurred in demonstrating that its proposed waste-water operation is protective of the environment. Now, maybe I didn't read thoroughly enough, but I didn't see an explanation of why this was appearing as a supplementary estimate; in other words, it wasn't anticipated in the original budget. Was this emergency timing that they had to show this, or was there extra money available, and that's why they got to do it? Why did this need to happen at this particular time?

In finance an explanation appears on page 30 of the supplementary supply estimates, No. 2, booklet. Well, you know, this is around payments to the heritage savings trust fund. Earlier in the evening during my response to the throne speech I was in fact questioned about that because I had raised the fact that the government does not plan on a regular basis – in other words, budget on a regular basis – to make contributions to the heritage savings trust fund. Indeed, here it is again in the government's own language. What we get here, and I'm quoting from page 120 of *Alberta Hansard* on April 21, 2008, is the hon. President of the Treasury Board speaking, in which he says that there was "\$918 million from the unallocated surplus commitment." So we only get money put into the heritage savings trust fund, additional new dollars, when there is an unanticipated, unallocated surplus.

The way things are happening now is that when the government – well, clearly, the government plans for surplus. I mean, today we had a budget in which they were pegging oil per barrel at between \$78 and \$86, and it's on the market today at \$119, so clearly the government is planning to give itself a surplus. But then that surplus is so-called allocated – this is Orwellian sometimes – into a series of endowment funds, many of which the Liberals, who came up with the idea, urged them to do, such as the stability fund. But then if they've got money even beyond the allocations that go to those, we get money going into the heritage savings trust fund, which is when you get unanticipated, unallocated surplus, which then gets committed to the heritage fund.

Perhaps for the person who questioned me earlier in the evening, they may want to refer to the man himself, the President of the Treasury Board, on page 120 of *Alberta Hansard* on April 21 because he answers the question.

Again, I underline the need to have regular contribution to this fund, not something that happens when there is a larger than anticipated surplus. That's wing and a prayer stuff, and it's really not adequate for what will be and is a diminishing nonrenewable resource.

Moving on to housing, appearing on page 34 of the supplementary

supply No. 2, this is very interesting money here. We have a situation where \$26 million is being added to the homeless and eviction prevention fund. This was a fund that started at \$7 million plus the \$26 million for a total of \$33 million in this fund. It says that 62,000 instances of assistance and 27,000 families and individuals were helped. Now, I'm pulling this from the *Hansard* that happened on Monday night. My question to the minister is: is this telling me that approximately every family of these 27,000 families or individuals received assistance twice? If we have 62,000 instances of assistance and 27,000 families or individuals receiving assistance, that looks to me like they each got it twice. Perhaps we could get some clarification on that.

I would also like to know how many landlords received funds. In particular, I'm wondering how many large companies we have with multiple property holdings who've received funding through this particular scheme because really to me what this is is a welfare scheme for landlords. They raise their rents as high as they want. The government steps in and pitches in for people that . . . [interjection] Well, it's the Conservatives, but that's the irony to me. We have sort of welfare for landlords, who are already making a killing because we have, like, a 1 per cent vacancy rate. Now they're able to charge whatever they want, and the government is going to step up and make the difference between what the individual could afford and what the landlord is charging.

I'd also like to know how many of these buildings are owned by out-of-province owners, where the money isn't even staying in the province. It's going out of the province to somebody else who is just making a packet of money. Because of a philosophical disagreement and ideological bent this provincial government will not put in place temporary rent controls because, horror of horror, it might adjust the marketplace. Well, I would argue that the marketplace is not functioning if we have that kind of thing happening. But, no, instead of that we're going to pay landlords, many of whom, I'm presuming – and please prove me wrong – are actually taking the money out of the province, so it doesn't even recirculate here. How many of these landlords are multiple unit holders versus a small owner-operator who lives on the premises and owns the building and their income is from the rent in that particular building? In addition, how many of these have their head offices registered outside of Alberta, telling us that the money is leaving the province?

9:50

I don't see an end to this. We've gone from \$7 million plus \$26 million to a total of \$33 million in not even one year. How long does the government anticipate keeping this up and increasing this fund without addressing the root cause of the problem? For a government that says it wants to be fiscally responsible and analyze the risks and the benefits and the cost benefit, blah, blah, blah, and all of this, they get themselves into situations like this one which appears to have no end, and nothing in what I've read said we will do this for two years or we will do this to a hundred million dollars or any of that. This strikes me as a very odd financial management scheme from this government.

Also, I'm sorry. I did look for this, and perhaps I missed it: an explanation of the strategic economic corridor investment initiative "to address better than expected progress on approved projects," appearing on page 38 of the booklet under Transportation. Now, does this have anything to do with better transit and transportation linkages in the Edmonton capital region? I know that one of the things that I keep hearing about as the MLA for Edmonton-Centre is: how are we going to be able to get support from the province to support what the municipalities are trying to do with a wider regional transportation plan? I suppose this could fall into that. It's

under Transportation. I'm just not quite sure what it is that it's covering.

Those were the questions that I had. Thank you very much for the opportunity to raise them. I look forward to hearing the responses from the respective ministers – or I'd be happy to get an e-mail – during Committee of the Whole on appropriation, Bill 5.

Thank you very much.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much. It's with interest that I rise to discuss Bill 5. Certainly, I have a few questions for the President of the Treasury Board regarding this bill. When we look at this and we see Reduction of Special Warrant, I'm surprised that there is a need – but, of course, there is – for a special warrant. I'm sure the hon. President of the Treasury Board was cautious about using the words "special warrant" to ask for a government advance. We know what previous Progressive Conservative governments have done with special warrants and the costs and the consequences of those special warrants. The consequences, Mr. Speaker, are still unfolding.

However, in regard to Bill 5 I'm interested in obtaining before debate or discussion goes any further the Treasury Board minutes that are the basis of this allocation. There are a number of Treasury Board minutes from respective departments listed here, and I'm sure there must have been a lot of discussion at the Treasury Board regarding these proposed appropriations. However, if the minister would commit to making these Treasury Board minutes public, I certainly would read them with interest.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre talked about the allocation for Employment and Immigration, Housing, but I certainly have an interest in the allocation for the Energy portfolio. We had quite a vigorous discussion, until it was shut off last fall, on Bill 46. Bill 46, for those who are interested, set up the new Energy Resources Conservation Board and also the Alberta Utilities Commission. At that time, when closure was being used to ram this bill through the Assembly, there was no discussion from that side of the House, Mr. Speaker, regarding the need of 14 and a half million dollars for transition costs for this bill. Now, \$7 million is transition costs for the Alberta Utilities Commission, \$3.5 million is for operating costs for the Alberta Utilities Commission, and \$4 million is for transition costs for the new Energy Resources Conservation Board. There was no discussion on that. There was no government member who stood up and said: "Hold on here. We don't have enough money." Very anxious to get that legislation passed, but there was no mention whatsoever of this.

If I could have an explanation as to why this wasn't taken care of in the routine EUB budget and also with the Utilities Commission. That seems to be an office that's growing in size and in budget, but I am still waiting to meet many Alberta energy consumers who have benefited from that commission. Certainly, the ones from our constituency that make an effort to contact that commission are not satisfied. They're not satisfied with what they're told, whether it's regarding an energy marketer or the price now or the proposed future prices of electricity. That's certainly one issue that I would like to see addressed before we proceed further with Bill 5.

There is a \$15 million capital grant here for regional landfill development for the municipality of Wood Buffalo. I also see in the budget documents from earlier today where there is an additional sum to address the recommendations of the Radke report. I think that is a good place for our money to be spent.

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

Now, we can go through this. Certainly, we look at Finance, and we look at Housing. We look at Transportation. These are all, some would say, reasonable requests. However, when we look at the request for Employment and Immigration, I'm not going to get into any detail here on the labour standards and workplace safety issue, what money is being spent on compliance and what money is being spent elsewhere. I will have a look through *Hansard*, and hopefully the questions that Edmonton-Centre asked will be addressed, and they will be in *Hansard*.

Mr. Speaker, with those comments I would like to conclude by reminding the President of the Treasury Board – and I was certainly listening when the sons and daughters of Norway spoke here a little earlier – and his colleagues to have a good look at how Norway is managing their nonrenewable resource revenue. There is 359 billion dollars plus, if I can use the word, squirrelled away there. The Minister of Transportation is somehow proud that we're attempting to save close to \$19 billion if not \$20 billion in our Alberta heritage savings trust fund. I think we can take a page out of Norwegian public policy. I would urge the minister to have a good look at what that country is doing and consider adopting some of their public policy for our province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

10:00

The Acting Speaker: Are there others?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 5 read a second time]

Consideration of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech *(continued)*

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak for the first time in this Assembly as the Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti. It was an honour to be present for the reading of the Speech from the Throne by His Honour the Lieutenant Governor. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate you, the Deputy Chair of Committees, and the Deputy Speaker, the Chairman of Committees, on being elected by your peers. Mr. Speaker, over the years I have heard of many new, positive initiatives your office has brought forward to support and promote this Assembly.

The last few weeks have been a whirlwind of information, and I have appreciated all of the staff in this Legislature Building for being so patient, professional, and helpful in my initiation to life under the dome. This is a very special day for me and my family. I would not have the privilege of representing the Grande Prairie-Wapiti constituency without the tremendous support of my wife, Sherry, our daughter, Jodie, and all of our extended family and friends. The only regret I have today is that our late son, Troy, is not present to see me achieve this great honour. I am blessed to have so many wonderful people who worked tirelessly to assist me in becoming their voice in the Alberta Legislature, and I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all who helped me get here.

I would also like to thank the electorate in my constituency for their faith in me, our Premier, and the government caucus to tackle the pressures of today and secure the opportunities of tomorrow. The Grande Prairie-Wapiti constituency has had the benefit of being served by some incredibly talented and dedicated members before

me, most recently Gord Graydon, who served from 2001 until the recent election, and Wayne Jacques, who served from 1993 to 2001. Their contributions and the contributions of those members before them have had a tremendous influence on the quality of life in the region, and I hope to continue building on their legacy.

I have lived and farmed in the Grande Prairie-Wapiti constituency my entire life. In my opinion, it is the best place to work, live, and raise a family. Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to be a farmer, and I'm proud of my English and Scottish heritage. I'm very proud to stand in this Assembly as the first farmer since the 1960s to represent the Grande Prairie-Wapiti constituency.

Grande Prairie-Wapiti is a large constituency which includes the big city of Grande Prairie and extends west to the British Columbia border, south to the vast green zone, including the pristine beauty of the Rocky Mountains and the rugged Kakwa Falls. Grande Prairie-Wapiti also consists of the towns of Wembley, Beaverlodge, and Hythe, and the communities of Dimsdale, Rio Grande, Elmworth, Goodfare, Demmitt, Valhalla, La Glace, Buffalo Lake, and Grovedale as well as the Horse Lake Indian reserve. My constituency also encompasses the rural municipalities of the county of Grande Prairie and the municipal district of Greenview.

With 15 years' experience as a municipal councillor with the municipal district of Greenview I feel I can represent all the people in this constituency, rural and urban, with equal compassion and fairness. For example, right now two different major industries in my region – the forest industry, especially OSB, and the beef industry – are suffering from huge economic hardships, and I'll do everything I can to help both of these industries.

Mr. Speaker, Grande Prairie-Wapiti is a vibrant population of diverse cultures. It is a community experiencing both tremendous growth opportunities and challenges. It offers a strong economy that includes agriculture, forestry, oil and gas, tourism, and recreation. I'm confident that by working together, even those industries experiencing current difficulties will continue to strengthen our community.

I am committed to working with my colleagues to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of health care delivery, to provide roads, schools, hospitals, and other public infrastructure to meet the needs of our growing constituency and province. I am committed to ensuring that our communities are safe and that we continue to focus on enhancing our high quality of life for Alberta families, seniors, and youth. It is also important that we work at finding a balance between development and environmental stewardship of our natural resources.

The province of Alberta has been very good to me and my family in the past. That is why I became an MLA, so that I can work hard with this government to make the province a good place for my grandchildren and my family into the future.

As a newly elected member I was deeply honoured to be asked by the Premier to be the chair of the Cabinet Policy Committee on Resources and the Environment. Our Premier's values and priorities reflect those of myself and my constituents, and I look forward to working hard to build a strong and stable future for Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, I understand my predecessor had a reputation for being one to make short speeches. In keeping with that tradition, I'll close now by thanking you for the opportunity to address this Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, section 29(2)(a) is available for anyone who has a question or wants to make a comment.

Hearing none, the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise today

to speak to the Speech from the Throne. First off, I would like to congratulate you, Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees, and your Speaker colleagues on your continuing resolve as a team to maintain order and decorum in this Assembly. I look forward to your guidance in the years ahead.

I come from a humble background. I'm a native Albertan, growing up in Waterton Lakes national park, a place that truly captures the scenic landscape of Alberta. I have also lived in Red Deer, Calgary, and St. Albert, the latter for the past 36 years.

Like all members my roots extend beyond our borders. My paternal grandparents came from Utah in 1904, and my maternal grandparents emigrated from Sweden shortly thereafter. So I see tonight that the Scandinavians dominate in this Assembly. My family has been here since the birth of Alberta, witnessing and participating in its growth from prairie frontier to the engine of prosperity that it is today.

Professionally my background is as a land surveyor. The land has been my drawing board. Throughout my political career on St. Albert city council and as chair of the former Edmonton Metropolitan Regional Planning Commission – I like to refer to myself as the chief pallbearer of EMRPC since I was there when it was closed down in 1995 – I've extended my involvement into land-use planning and land management. I also have considerable experience in adjudication, having served in several quasi-judicial capacities in both the public and private arenas.

I've travelled extensively throughout the world observing land tenure and land management problems abroad, working in co-operation with UN-Habitat. I'm currently serving my final year as a vice-president of the Fédération internationale des géomètres, also known as the International Federation of Surveyors.

10:10

Land surveying has instilled in me a respect for the land. Elmer Ghostkeeper, a respected Métis philosopher and councillor from Buffalo Lake Métis settlement, says with regard to the Métis people, "We don't live off the land; we live with the land." I adopt that philosophy as my own. Living with the land means that we must manage the land, and we must plan. This means planning for future land use as our province grows and prospers.

The Speech from the Throne indicated that this government will take steps to resolve conflict among various land uses. This includes changing the way that land decisions are made. The land-use framework is essential to managing Alberta's growth in a way that meets Alberta's environmental and social priorities. All Albertans truly must live with the land and understand the importance of proper land management.

I'm pleased to see a provincial plan in this regard that will address the broad-brush land-use policies that speak to environmental protection, recreational development, industrial growth, urban expansion, and so on. I support the concept of a hierarchy of regional and local land-use plans in harmony with the land-use framework and other broad-based policy documents.

Many members here will remember the words of Chief Clarence Louie from the Osoyoos Indian Band in his recent speech to Economic Development Edmonton in reference to land. "We call her Mother," he said. Mother is our mainstay. We must live with her. We must cherish her. We must listen to her. This government has listened and continues to listen, for she is our livelihood. From her we get our food, our shelter, our clothing. Everything ultimately comes from her.

As far as I know, I am only the second land surveyor to come in this honourable Assembly. The hon. Jean-Léon Côté, grandfather and namesake of our distinguished Alberta Court of Appeal Justice,

served in this Assembly from 1909 until 1923. I can only assume that he was the father of the original Land Surveyors Act, passed in this Assembly in 1910. It is interesting that Mr. Côté was the eighth person to be commissioned as an Alberta land surveyor. To date there have only been 794 land surveyors to qualify in the 99-year history of the Alberta Land Surveyors' Association. I believe that Mr. Speaker the other day indicated that there have only been 791 members elected to this Assembly in the 103-year history of this institution. A very interesting parallel.

I'd now like to talk a bit about my constituency. The constituency of St. Albert encompasses almost three-quarters of the city of St. Albert, Alberta's oldest nonfortress settlement, which was founded by Father Albert Lacombe in 1861. St. Albert will be celebrating its 150th anniversary in three years. Settled along the Sturgeon River, it is a picturesque bedroom community full of families that balance hard work and time with loved ones. Despite its idyllic setting my constituents still have concerns, though the government addressed many items in the Speech from the Throne that work towards offering solutions to young families, the aging baby boomers, and senior citizens.

St. Albert is mainly a residential community with a high standard of living. As such, the tax base is 90 per cent residential versus 10 per cent industrial-commercial. Hence, residential taxes are high. This is compounded by a major operating deficit in our new sports complex, Servus Place, which is placing an added burden on taxpayers.

Now, contrary to public opinion bedroom communities like St. Albert are not a draw on Edmonton's tax dollars. In fact, they provide that vital resource, skilled labour, that drives the larger cities' engines. Residential communities are a net liability from a taxation perspective as residential services are expensive to provide as compared to the services required by commercial and industrial taxpayers.

With all of these municipal issues it is important that the government has pledged to work with municipalities to help deal with the unique needs of our urban centres as our province grows. I am pleased that municipalities like St. Albert will have the assistance of the province in dealing with growth pressures so that they have more energy to focus on resolving a myriad of other local issues.

Seniors on the income threshold want to maintain a standard of living they have become accustomed to, so I'm pleased to see that our government will continue to address housing needs for groups such as seniors. Actions such as these will ensure that seniors vulnerable to growth pressures are able to maintain a high quality of life. This government knows how hard its citizens work and that it is important to show thanks to those that have contributed so much to this province.

Residents are concerned about growth and environmental issues. The government is keenly aware of the pressures created by rapid growth, and as such we are developing new approaches to deal with the cumulative effects of development on a regional scale. This includes taking into account the social, economic, and environmental impact of development. The restoration of a sound planning framework in the capital region growth plan will address these issues.

Access to health care services is also a concern for my constituency. I am pleased that improving the efficiency and effectiveness of health care delivery is a priority for our government. This includes ensuring that Albertans have high-quality health care that is still affordable. Of course, a health care system cannot function without health care professionals, so it is also important to my constituency that the government is working hard to ensure that we train and recruit more doctors and nurses.

I'm pleased that the hon. minister of finance in her Budget Address this afternoon has announced the elimination of health care premiums next year.

Mental health services are valued by my constituents, and the government ensured in the Speech from the Throne that services and facilities available to those with mental health concerns will be expanded and improved.

Constituents also want to see an expansion of the francophone school system to accommodate the high school curricula.

The completion of the Ray Gibbon Drive highway 2 bypass is key for my constituents, especially with this project having been delayed for many years because of environmental issues. This is the type of project that I'm hopeful will be addressed in the government's 20-year capital plan and also in regional plans.

Some of these matters are unique to my constituency, but most issues are shared by Albertans across the province.

With all these concerns it is important that we have a plan as our province grows. Alberta had a plan, but its major focus was on one thing: paying down the debt. It's great to see that our Premier has a well-rounded plan that is not single faceted. Planning should be well rounded in that it looks not only to our goal but also looks toward the consequences of our actions. The debt has been paid down, and it is time we work towards our new plan, that looks not just at our economic well-being or our fiscal planning but at the total plan. How does our plan affect our neighbours, how does it affect our environment, and how does it affect our future?

Planning looks to the future. Premier Stelmach's priorities recognize that we need to plan for the future. When I think about the future, I think about an Alberta that is still prosperous, still entrepreneurial, and still full of people who know that innovation and self-reliance can help achieve the best results. It will be an Alberta where my children and grandchildren are compelled to live and work because of the great opportunities available, unmatched elsewhere in the world, and because their hard work will be rewarded with low taxes and a high quality of life.

10:20

Life, growth, planning is not a simple equation. It's complex like our government structure, with over 20 departments, multi committees, and 83 members working hard to meet the challenges of nearly 4 million citizens. This government has a plan that looks at the priorities and aspirations of Albertans. It clearly sets out priorities that are realistic and achievable. It is a plan that consults stakeholders and is aware of the impacts on the economy, on the environment, and on society. It looks towards what is needed now and what will be needed in the future. This is a plan I'm honoured to work towards in this session of the Legislature with all of my colleagues. All of us in this Assembly must remember what an extraordinary privilege it is to be an elected official, especially in a province like Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Section 29(2)(a) is available. The Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. My question to the member – and thank you very much for your maiden speech, your response to the throne speech – well, three questions: is the member supportive of the new capital region organization around the capital, is the member supportive of the work of the capital region integrated growth strategy report, and is the member supportive of the 20-year strategic capital plan that outlines the need for an LRT system that serves long-term growth of the region?

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Allred: Yes. Thank you for that question. Very clearly, I'm very supportive of the capital region growth plan. I think it's long overdue. As I indicated, in 1995 I was chair of the Edmonton Metropolitan Regional Planning Commission, which operated very well. It was one of the best-run planning commissions in the province, with very few problems. All of the issues were resolved around the table, they were decided, and things moved on with no animosity between members. There was very good co-operation from all of the then 19 member municipalities in the region.

Certainly, the capital region growth plan I'm very supportive of. I would hope that it would build on the Edmonton metropolitan regional plan that had been adopted back then by the MRPC. It did not at that time get into such issues as LRT, but I'm fully supportive of LRT being part of the new capital region plan. I think it's a very far-sighted plan and organization that is being developed, but it will evolve over time to address a number of regional issues.

Now, if I may sir, I would like to . . .

The Acting Speaker: Excuse me. As you've finished, you cannot close debate. Someone else will have to.

Ms Blakeman: Is there anything else that the member would like to tell us tonight?

Mr. Allred: Just one small thing. I would like to now move that we adjourn debate on the Speech from the Throne, which I should have done.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

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

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's been a very enlightening and a very rewarding evening of vigorous debate in some cases and outstanding maiden speeches in others. On that note, I would move that we now adjourn and resume sitting at 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.

[Motion carried; at 10:24 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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