



Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature  
First Session

# Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, April 23, 2008

Issue 7a

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

# Legislative Assembly of Alberta

## The 27th Legislature

First Session

Kowalski, Hon. Ken, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock, Speaker  
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 Mitzel, Len, Cypress-Medicine Hat, Deputy Chair of Committees

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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. Yvonne, Calgary-Cross (PC),                      Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs</p> <p>Goudreau, Hon. Hector G., Dunvegan-Central Peace (PC),                      Minister of Employment and Immigration</p> <p>Griffiths, Doug, Battle River-Wainwright (PC),                      Parliamentary Assistant, Agriculture and Rural Development</p> <p>Groeneveld, Hon. George, Highwood (PC),                      Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development</p> <p>Hancock, Hon. Dave, QC, Edmonton-Whitemud (PC),                      Minister of Education, Government House Leader</p> <p>Hayden, Hon. Jack, Drumheller-Stettler (PC),                      Minister of Infrastructure</p> <p>Hehr, Kent, Calgary-Buffalo (L)</p> <p>Horne, Fred, Edmonton-Rutherford (PC)</p> <p>Horner, Hon. 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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

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, April 23, 2008

[The Speaker in the chair]

### Prayers

**The Speaker:** Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Guide us all in our deliberations and debate that we may determine courses of action which will be to the enduring benefit of our province of Alberta. Amen.

Please be seated.

### Introduction of Visitors

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

**Mr. Knight:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise today to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly the Consul General for the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, Mr. Moin-ul-Haque. I was pleased to host a lunch earlier today for the Consul General, who is visiting us from Vancouver. Over the last five years Pakistan has been among the top sources of immigration to our province, and that has led to the strong, vibrant, and growing community that Alberta has now. I'd ask the hon. members of this Assembly to give the Consul General our traditional warm welcome to this Assembly.

**Mr. Elniski:** Mr. Speaker, I introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Mr. Brent Rathgeber, the former MLA for the Edmonton-Calder constituency from 2001 to 2004. He is currently practising law and is eagerly awaiting the next federal election as the Conservative candidate for Edmonton-St. Albert. Please join me in welcoming him back to these hallowed Chambers.

### Introduction of Guests

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

**Mr. Johnson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure for me to be able to rise and introduce to you and through you a group of students from a community in my constituency. About 30 students have come from the small community of Waskatenau, which has about 250 people, about an hour and a half northeast of Edmonton. They've come in with teachers Gerald Markovich and Melissa Zacour and bus driver Kim Foster. They've brought in 27 students from grades 4 to 9. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

**Mr. Sandhu:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'd like to welcome members of the Northgate Lions seniors' centre, who are visiting the Assembly today. I'm pleased they were able to come for a tour and stay to watch question period. Seniors have worked so hard to make this province a great place to live, and I'm honoured to represent them in the Legislature for the riding of Edmonton-Manning. I would like to ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Peace River.

**Mr. Oberle:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my distinct pleasure to

introduce to you today and through you to all hon. members of this Assembly two first-year engineering students from pretty well opposite ends of the province. They're here on a break between exams. From the constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills we have Teagan Oulton, and from the beautiful constituency of Peace River my own son Kevin Oberle. I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

**Mr. VanderBurg:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly Evelyn Oberg. Evelyn is my former assistant, a very able one at that, and the wife of the former minister of finance. She's joined today by two friends from Montreal – I guess that's the next city of champions, wouldn't it be? – Diane Racine and Pierre Nolet, who have come west to the beautiful scenery of the Rocky Mountains and to let everybody know that there are Canadians left in the playoffs. Please join me in giving them the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

**The Speaker:** Hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, you have guests today?

**Mr. Xiao:** Well, Mr. Speaker, my guests have not arrived, but my son Allen and my wife, Alice, and Mr. Keith Cumming will sit in your gallery. They are coming here to hear my maiden speech.

Thank you. I appreciate it.

### Members' Statements

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

#### Dr. Martha Kostuch

**Ms Woo-Paw:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As all of us here today know, Dr. Martha Kostuch has been a passionate advocate for the environment for more than 30 years. It is my sad duty to report that earlier today Dr. Kostuch passed away. A veterinarian by trade, Martha, as she was known to so many, always kept the health of animals and people close to her heart. She was a tremendous role model who earned respect around the world. Perhaps best known for her ability to bring together stakeholders and build consensus, she worked with the Clean Air Strategic Alliance, the Alberta Wilderness Association, the Prairie Acid Rain Coalition, the Friends of the Oldman River, and many others over the years.

Martha knew that there is a shared responsibility for all sectors to act as good stewards of the environment. As she proved early on, by bringing people together from all perspectives on an issue to discuss solutions, real change can happen. This process and Martha herself have had a significant impact on how environmental management policy is developed in Alberta, and this will be her legacy into the future.

I'm proud to say that our government recognized Dr. Kostuch's efforts earlier this week with a new bursary in her name. This bursary will help support up-and-coming environmental leaders to partake in the program on consensus building through the Alberta Arbitration and Mediation Society. This program will allow these future leaders to develop some of the skills Martha herself demonstrated so well. If those who follow Martha show half her passion, integrity, tenacity, and intelligence, then they will indeed help protect the environment.

I understand that Martha has requested that if people want to honour her memory, they do so by doing something for the environment, so I encourage all of us today to do our part.

On behalf of all my colleagues in the Legislature I want to pass on our thoughts and prayers to Dr. Martha Kostuch's family during this difficult time. They can be very proud of her accomplishments.

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

#### Improving Public Education in Alberta

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Improving public education in Alberta. Committing \$5.8 billion to public education appears to be an astronomical outlay of taxpayer dollars, a major investment in Alberta's future, an overall increase of between 4.3 to 4.5 per cent. I commend the government for having negotiated in good faith with Alberta's hard-working educators, assuming the unfunded liability portion of their pensions, thus guaranteeing five years of contract stability, dedicated education delivery to students, and security for parents.

That liability didn't magically disappear. Alberta taxpayers remain on the hook for an amount which is currently approaching \$7 billion and will continue to rise to \$46 billion by 2060 unless the government ramps up its current pace of paying down that debt. This accountability was not apparent in either the supplementary supply budget or the budget tabled yesterday. Albertans must hold this government to account. When reality replaces reverie, when the majority of the \$5.8 billion arrives in school board accounts, what improvements can students, parents, educators, and trustees expect?

To begin, the 4.5 per cent increase figure barely compensates for inflationary increases, the downside of Alberta's booming economy. Although the budget for reducing class size has increased by 9 per cent, the reality is that due to this government's flawed space utilization formula school boards have been forced to close considerably more schools in central communities than they have opened up in rapidly expanding suburbs.

Calgary still has 40 communities without schools. In other words, there are no spaces for these proposed smaller classes which the Kratzmann report recommended as having a pupil-teacher ration of 20 to 1 way back in 1980. There is no sign of progress on the 18 P3 schools which were promised almost a year ago by the former Minister of Education, now the minister of health. When the snow melts, buckets will continue to be obstacles in Calgary and Edmonton schools, whose average age is over 40 years old.

Don't be fooled by the promises of the financial figures. Alberta's public education challenges are far from resolved.

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

1:40

#### Shinia Van

**Mr. Bhullar:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I once again rise because I'm tremendously proud of another constituent of mine. A young constituent of the name Shinia Van was recently selected as a grade 6 finalist in the Alberta branch of the 2008 Commonwealth Parliamentary Association essay contest.

Shinia is a student of the G.W. Skene elementary community school and a strong example of the potential that young people in my constituency have. We must encourage young people like Shinia to excel in all they undertake, and we must encourage them to participate in these sorts of activities so that they can be the future leaders of tomorrow.

Mr. Speaker, I am absolutely certain that I will be working with Shinia in the future, and I am certain that she will bring much joy and success and good fortune to the people of Calgary-Montrose.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

#### Rotary Club of St. Albert Music Festival

**Mr. Allred:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today to recognize the Rotary Club of St. Albert Music Festival, which is in its 31st year. The performances, which have lasted 10 days, have featured a total of 2,500 participants in 57 separate sessions.

The festival concludes this evening with the 2008 grand concert at the Arden Theatre. This music festival is another milestone in the record of the arts in the city of St. Albert in the province of Alberta.

Thank you.

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

#### Calgary Board of Education

**Mr. Fawcett:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize the Calgary board of education, who just released their 2008 report to the community, as was tabled by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity yesterday. I want to pay tribute to the organization for helping guide the next generation of Albertans on a path to success.

In the last few years Calgary board of education students have achieved impeccable scores on their grade 12 diploma exams, with 48 per cent of its students receiving excellence in chemistry 30, 39 per cent achieving excellence in physics, 33 per cent in biology, and 32 per cent in pure math. These are well above the provincial averages and a great success story for public education in Calgary.

Not only does the Calgary board of education achieve world-class results, but I know that it works constantly to improve their ratings. Upon review of the CBEs results this year on provincial achievement tests, Dr. Jim Dueck, ADM of Education, claimed: provincial achievement tests yield an interesting trend; I see six consecutive years of improvement.

Aside from offering excellent education to its students, the CBE is committed to teaching students to become responsible global citizens and instilling tomorrow's leaders with a sense of values, morals, and ethics: the foundation of the board's operations. I want to commend them for all their hard work and encourage them to continue to work hard for the next generation of Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

#### St. George's Day

**Dr. Brown:** Mr. Speaker, I rise today in recognition of St. George's Day. While little is known of the life of St. George, it is believed that he was a soldier in the Roman army who died a martyr for protesting the persecution of Christians. He is believed to have been beheaded in Palestine in the reign of the Roman emperor Diocletian on April 23, 303 AD.

The tale of St. George spread through all of Christendom and eventually made its way to the shores of England, where it became entrenched into that country's national identity. In the year 1222 the Council of Oxford declared April 23 to be St. George's Day. St. George was officially recognized as the patron saint of England in 1415.

His standard is the red perpendicular cross on a white background, which makes up the English national flag and which is one of the components of the Union Jack of the United Kingdom. The cross is an important part of the flags of four provinces flying in this Assembly, including our own Alberta provincial flag as well as our provincial crest.

In 1940 King George VI inaugurated the George Cross for civilians who display acts of the greatest heroism or of the most conspicuous courage in circumstances of extreme danger.

Mr. Speaker, we and the English-speaking peoples of the world share many bonds, including the proud heritage of our parliamentary institutions and our common law and our dedication to the defense of freedom and democracy. Today I would like to recognize St. George's Day on behalf of our friends in England, for all those of English heritage, and for all those people around the world who embody the heroic spirit of St. George.

### Presenting Petitions

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

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased to rise and present a petition signed by a number of individuals who reside in Edmonton-Whitemud, Sherwood Park, Edmonton-McClung, Edmonton-Decore, and Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert. They are urging the government to "commission an independent and public inquiry into the Alberta Government's administration of or involvement with the Local Authorities Pension Plan, the Public Service Pension Plan, and the [ATA] Retirement Fund."

Thank you.

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

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am tabling a petition today signed by citizens from places in constituencies including Wetaskiwin-Camrose, Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, Drayton Valley-Calmar, and Lacombe-Ponoka petitioning the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to commission an independent and public inquiry into pensions just as the Member for Edmonton-Centre described.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Taylor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise in the House today and present a petition signed by 20 Calgarians petitioning the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to "commission an independent and public inquiry into the Alberta Government's administration of or involvement with the [LAPP], the Public Service Pension Plan, and the Alberta Teachers' Retirement Fund."

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

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two petitions to table today. The first reads as follows: "We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to pass legislation that will prohibit emotional bullying and psychological harassment in the workplace." This has 18 signatures.

The second reads:

We the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to commission an independent and public inquiry into the Alberta Government's administration of or involvement with the Local Authorities Pension Plan, the Public Service Pension Plan, and the Alberta Teachers' Retirement Fund.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Mr. Kang:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have one petition today to present to the Legislature, and it reads:

We the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative

Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to commission an independent and public inquiry into the Alberta Government's administration of or involvement with the Local Authorities Pension Plan, the Public Service Pension Plan, and the Alberta Teachers' Retirement Fund.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two petitions to present to the Legislative Assembly today. The first one reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to:

1. Ensure that the remuneration paid to employees working with people with disabilities is standardized across the sector, regardless of whether these workers are employed by the government or by community-based or private providers;
2. Ensure these employees are fairly compensated and that their wages remain competitive with other sectors to reflect the valuable and crucial service they provide;
3. Improve employees' access to professional development opportunities (training and upgrading); and
4. Introduce province-wide service and outcomes-focused level-of-care standards.

This petition is signed by approximately a hundred Albertans from all over the province.

My second petition reads:

We the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to commission an independent and public inquiry into the Alberta Government's administration of or involvement with the Local Authorities Pension Plan, the Public Service Pension Plan, and the Alberta Teachers' Retirement Fund.

This petition is signed by 20 concerned Albertans from Calgary.

Thank you.

### Introduction of Bills

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

#### Bill 6

#### Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2008

**Mr. Snelgrove:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 6, the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2008. This being a money bill, His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

The 2008-09 government and Legislative Assembly estimates requesting spending authority for the '08-09 fiscal year were tabled yesterday. The Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2008, will provide spending authority to the Legislative Assembly and to the government from April 1, 2008, to June 15, 2008, inclusive. During that period it is anticipated that spending authorization will have been provided for the entire fiscal year ending March 31, 2009. Interim supply amounts are based on the department's need to fund government programs and services until June 15. While many payments are monthly, other payments are due at the beginning of each quarter and at the beginning of the fiscal year. Some payments are seasonal.

The act would provide spending authority for the following amounts: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$9.5 billion; capital investment, \$514 million; nonbudgetary disbursements, \$42 million; and lottery fund payments, \$401 million. Mr. Speaker, interim supply for the period April 1 to June 1 inclusive was

approved through two special warrants. This act ratifies these special warrants.

[Motion carried; Bill 6 read a first time]

1:50

### Oral Question Period

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

#### Farm Safety

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Another tragic accident occurred yesterday when a farm worker at a feedlot near High River was killed after falling from a grain silo. Last spring, when we asked in this Assembly the Premier to consider implementing basic safety requirements for farm workers, he responded, "Why should we be funding common sense? . . . if it's a dangerous situation in any respect, just because we have regulations does not mean that somebody is going to follow them." My question is to the Premier. Will this government finally acknowledge that preventing farm fatalities in Alberta requires provincial action and not simply common sense?

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

**Mr. Groeneveld:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, every farm accident and fatality is grievous to us on this side of the House and, indeed, everyone in agriculture. This gentleman was a constituent, a neighbour, and I knew him very well. My thoughts and prayers certainly go out to his family at this time.

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

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you. Again, then, to this minister. Given that 32 farm fatalities were reported in Alberta in the last two years alone, will this government finally concede that workers at corporate farms need the same protection through workplace safety legislation as other workers in the province?

**Mr. Groeneveld:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I wish it was that simple, but farms are very unique in that the work sites and the homes are the same. Families live, work, and play in these areas. We're talking about education, I suspect, more than rules.

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

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, then, to the same minister. Given that the Supreme Court of Canada ruled in 2001 that the total exclusion of farm workers from labour legislation was unconstitutional and that the Alberta Federation of Labour has said that Alberta has the worst standards in Canada with regard to farm safety, how many farmers have to die in Alberta before this government takes action?

**Mr. Groeneveld:** Well, Mr. Speaker, it's a grievous time, and to ask a question like that, I think, is totally bizarre. I don't think it's relevant, probably, to what's happening out on the farm. Farms are a dangerous place to work. I have got children, and I've got grandchildren out there. We have to educate these people. We can make rules, and we can make rules, and we can make rules. We make seatbelt rules, but look at what happens.

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

#### Bitumen Royalties

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 1996 this government signed deals with Suncor and Syncrude letting them shift their payments of royalties for the synthetic crude oil they produce to the lower value bitumen. Government documents just released show that this change is estimated to cost the provincial government over \$800 million next year alone. My questions are to the Minister of Energy. Why did the government sign this deal?

**Mr. Knight:** Mr. Speaker, the generic oil royalty structure that was put in place some 10 or 12 years ago generated for the province of Alberta an untold amount of development, wealth generation, and indeed it was the catalyst that allowed us to get from the point where we were, of nearly no development with those particular industries, to a global – global – concept with respect to this development and its importance in energy security in Canada and, indeed, in North America.

**Dr. Taft:** To the same minister. Given that this government claimed it was not going to grandfather old agreements concerning royalties, including this one, but would bring them under a new system, why is this government continuing with bitumen pricing?

**Mr. Knight:** Well, Mr. Speaker, the answer to that question is quite straightforward, I think. If you look at any other operations with oil development in the province of Alberta, we don't tax or take royalty on a manufactured product. In the first instance, when the Crown agreements were established, the idea that we would take royalty on the manufactured product was part and parcel of our attempt to get investment into the province. It worked very well.

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

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Does this minister believe that cutting the amount these companies pay – in the case of these two I mentioned, this will amount to \$4 billion over five years. Is that a fair deal for Albertans in this minister's view?

**Mr. Knight:** Mr. Speaker, as we go through the rest of our negotiations with respect to Crown agreements, I'm sure that the member opposite will come to the conclusion at the end of the day that, in fact, the Crown agreements were very good agreements, continue to be good agreements. As we come to the conclusion of the transfer of those agreements to the new royalty framework, we have said that we will collect an additional 20 per cent in royalties from those particular facilities, and we're on track to do exactly that.

#### Heritage Savings Trust Fund

**Ms Blakeman:** Mr. Speaker, everyone knows that when it comes to savings, you should always pay yourself first. Everyone, that is, except for this government. Yesterday's announcement revealed that yet again there is absolutely no money budgeted for the heritage fund except for inflation-proofing as you can see if you check page 220 of the government estimates. My questions are to the Minister of the Treasury Board. How can the minister call this budget fiscally responsible when it doesn't even follow the most basic principle: to pay yourself first?

**Mr. Snelgrove:** Well, Mr. Speaker, we're not paying ourselves first. We're looking after Albertans first, the immediate needs of Albertans. The Premier has indicated to the Minister of Finance and Enterprise that we will study very carefully our long-term strategy of savings and investment. We will report back to the House how we intend to use the tremendously lucky and prosperous financial position this government is in. The savings and investment plan will be brought back to the House.

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

**Ms Blakeman:** Well, thank you. Once again, how can the minister say that he is looking after all Albertans when the most basic principle of putting a regular payment into a savings account is not being followed by this government?

**Mr. Snelgrove:** Mr. Speaker, one of the first moves our Premier made was to ensure that were we to have unanticipated surplus dollars, fully one-third of that money would go into the heritage fund. Last year that was nearly \$900 million that went into the heritage fund. So simply saying at this point, "We're going to have this much money, and when we do, we'll put it in the bank" is one thing. We've made a commitment to look after Albertans and their immediate needs first, and if excess dollars arise, then we will invest it not only in the heritage savings trust fund but other endowments.

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

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you. Again to the same minister. Why does this government continue to hope for a windfall in order to be able to secure the future of our grandchildren by depending on unallocated, unanticipated surpluses before you can make one deposit into the heritage fund?

**Mr. Snelgrove:** Mr. Speaker, it's always better to plan prudently and be rewarded successfully at the end. The money that is going to come from our surpluses or from revenues in excess of spending will be appropriately invested in Albertans' future, whether it be through the heritage savings trust fund, the medical endowments for research, or our educational endowments. All of that money is being invested for Albertans.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Peace River.

2:00

### Oil Price Forecasting

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, Mark Twain, John Steinbeck, and Stephen King could not have produced a bigger work of fiction than yesterday's budget. Over the last five years this government has lowballed government royalty revenue by over \$20 billion, and it will be over \$5 billion in this year alone. Hiding behind the fig leaf of being fiscally prudent, this lowball estimate allows the Conservatives to dodge questions about their failure to develop a long-term financial strategy for Alberta. My question is to the President of the Treasury Board. Given that the budget could qualify for a Giller prize for fiction, can the President of the Treasury Board explain why . . .

**The Speaker:** The hon. president to respond, please.

**Mr. Snelgrove:** I should start this with once upon a time. Mr. Speaker, we do a good job of showing our books. They are amongst

the best in the world. They are open. They are transparent. Our budgeting is done based on prudent advice from a broad spectrum of people who actually know the oil industry, not the tea leaf specialists that they employ over on that side.

**Mr. Mason:** Mr. Speaker, another page of fractured fairy tales.

Given that Suncor has used a projection of \$125 a barrel and other qualified people have used much higher numbers, why has the government settled on \$78 a barrel as their figure to predict revenues when, in fact, that means that they're really lowballing royalty revenue by \$5 billion?

**Mr. Snelgrove:** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has proven time and time again in this Assembly that he has the uncanny ability to predict the past. Not all of Alberta's oil is \$120 oil. Where I come from, in Lloydminster, the heavy crude is selling at around \$70, and much of the bitumen is selling for far less than \$120. So to continually throw out the idea that it's all \$120 a barrel oil and would provide all these riches is simply misleading the rest of Alberta.

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

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The President of the Treasury Board suggests that we have 20/20 hindsight, but we've been far better at predicting these oil prices than the government has. If the government doesn't want to compare its forecast to Suncor, who's actually in the industry, then can he tell us why his estimate for the price of oil is so much lower than that of the Conference Board of Canada, Global Insight, RBC, and at least nine other projections?

**Mr. Snelgrove:** Mr. Speaker, the numbers are done by using a lot of the information from a lot of the same people that the hon. member talked about. The important part here is that it's not necessarily how much money you can generate as a government and spend. It's what you actually need to spend to ensure that the citizens of Alberta are getting the services and infrastructure they need to carry on their everyday lives. So contrary to their thinking, "If we could just tax more, if we could just get more, we could spend more, and, you know, if we can't tax more, we'll just borrow more," this is what we call prudent planning and spending.

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

### Nuclear Power

**Mr. Oberle:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many of my constituents have come to me with questions on what the province plans to do on the issue of nuclear energy. Although the Minister of Energy has stated repeatedly that the province does not discriminate against any particular form of electrical generation, I think that most Albertans would agree that nuclear energy is a unique issue. My questions are to the Minister of Energy. First, does the province have any plans to deal with the nuclear issue on a provincial basis?

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

**Mr. Knight:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do agree that nuclear energy is a unique issue, and Albertans have very strong feelings about it. Today I have announced the membership of our expert panel on nuclear energy. This panel will examine the nuclear issue objectively and gather available information on nuclear energy. It

will also consider this issue in the context of our provincial energy strategy, which is also under development.

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

**Mr. Oberle:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A supplemental to the same minister: when will Albertans have a chance to voice their opinions on nuclear energy and any provincial policies regarding nuclear energy?

**Mr. Knight:** Mr. Speaker, the opinions of Albertans are obviously of the utmost importance to our decision-making process. After this panel's report is submitted this fall, we will determine how best to move forward in consulting with Albertans. Having all of the report's information on the table will allow us to engage Albertans in a productive and meaningful dialogue on this subject at a later date.

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

**Mr. Oberle:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for those answers. Could the minister clarify for my constituents and for this House if the province has the ability to develop its own nuclear power policy considering that the construction of nuclear facilities is under federal jurisdiction?

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

**Mr. Knight:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me be clear that the province maintains the right to intervene and set its own policies related to nuclear energy. The province also maintains regulatory responsibility related to many aspects of nuclear energy, such as water usage, land use, and emergency preparedness. In fact, part of the panel's work will be to examine whether any proposed nuclear project could meet the high expectations of Albertans and our government for the protection of the public and our environment.

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

### Health Care Spending

**Mr. Taylor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First off, I'd like to thank the government for implementing yet another of our policies with its announcement to eliminate health care premiums yesterday.

The situation in Calgary is a perfect example of this government's failure to properly manage our health care system. The Calgary health region has built and continues to build new health care facilities, but because it hasn't been given proper operational funding, the region is left with a whole lot of shiny new beds that sit unused in their shiny new buildings. To the minister of health: how can the minister speak of improving access when this government's poor management skills have led to newly built beds lying empty because there aren't enough staff members to run them?

**Mr. Liepert:** Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, the funding for the Calgary health region in yesterday's budget will have increased in this fiscal year by just under 9 per cent. I happened to have a chat with the CEO of the Calgary health region yesterday, and he expressed to me that they were appreciative of the dollars that they received in the budget, so I'm not sure who the hon. member has been talking to.

**Mr. Taylor:** Gee, Mr. Speaker, I've been talking to the same guy.

Can the minister explain why over 2,000 Albertans in the last two years have had their surgeries cancelled by Capital health because of staffing and bed shortages when those same people live in a province with record spending and billions in surpluses?

**Mr. Liepert:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I think we've been fairly clear in this House that we will be rolling out an action plan on health care that will address some of the issues, that will I believe make our health care system more effective and more efficient. Unlike the Official Opposition here we don't believe that just simply throwing more money at the situation is going to solve the problem.

**Mr. Taylor:** Nor do we, Mr. Speaker. We believe that there's enough money in the system. The management problem is the issue.

Last May the previous health minister stated that one thing everyone agrees on is that the Tom Baker cancer centre is not sufficient, so why was there nothing in the budget yesterday for this facility? Or hasn't the minister had a chance to be properly briefed yet?

**Mr. Liepert:** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member starts off by saying that he agrees that there is enough money in the system, that it just needs to be managed properly. Then he goes on to ask for more money. So I'm not quite sure where he's coming from with his question.

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

### Recruitment of Foreign Health Care Professionals

**Mr. Benito:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is facing many health-related workforce shortages, particularly in the area of nursing. I understand that the departments of Health and Wellness and Employment and Immigration and the health regions are actively recruiting registered nurses, yet when these professionals come to Alberta, it is taking a very long time to get them on the front lines. Can the Minister of Health and Wellness tell us what the holdup is?

**Mr. Liepert:** Mr. Speaker, the recruitment of foreign professionals for our health care system is very much part of our workforce strategy in health care. We recognized that last week when we released our health action plans. I did also mention at that time that we want to make it very clear to the colleges that register these professionals that we want to remove barriers that exist to having these professionals working in our country. What we've done through the Department of Health and Wellness is provided a \$500,000 grant to the college to help streamline the application process.

**Mr. Benito:** My first supplementary question: can the Minister of Health and Wellness tell us what other work is being done to expedite the process of getting the health professionals that we need on the front lines in Alberta?

2:10

**Mr. Liepert:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I think the college of registered nurses of Alberta should be congratulated because it was just this week that the college announced that they will be starting immediately the issuing of a temporary, limited licence for internationally educated nurses. This will allow these nurses to work while they complete their requirements for their full RN licence in our country.



**Mr. Benito:** Mr. Speaker, my third question is to the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. What is your ministry doing to bring more international nurses into Alberta's hospitals and clinics?

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

**Mr. Horner:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the Minister of Health and Wellness just stated, we're working very closely with the college of registered nurses as well as all of the other colleges to develop the bridging programs and the upgrading skills if they're required. Mount Royal College has international courses in assessment both in Edmonton and Calgary, and they'll be doing more than 600 applicants per year. It is our intention to make sure that those professionals get the training they need as quickly as possible.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

#### Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped

**Mr. Hehr:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For the third time in the past 12 months AISH benefits were increased: a whopping \$33 here, 10 per cent there, all falling very short of meeting Statistics Canada's low-income cut-off point of about \$1,800 a month. These haphazard and meagre increases prove themselves to be just that: insufficient, unreliable, and paltry. While this government chooses to chase its own tail in providing reliable and realistic supports for the disabled, vulnerable people struggle to make ends meet. To the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports: why doesn't this government finally raise AISH benefits to a reasonable level and then index them to inflation on a regular basis?

**Mrs. Jablonski:** Thank you very much for that question. The AISH community is a very important community to us here in this government. The member is quite correct in mentioning that we have raised it a number of times, four times in the last two years. But beyond the money grant that we give to each AISH client, we also give all the medical benefits, including eye care and dental care. We give ambulance service and the Aids to Daily Living. On top of that, all AISH clients are able to apply for any of our housing benefits that we have available from this government.

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

**Mr. Hehr:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. After an individual who receives AISH enters into marriage, their benefits run the risk of being completely cut off as a result of their partner's income. If this government is supportive of family, why is it that they are forcing an individual to choose between receiving AISH benefits or getting married but losing their only source of economic independence?

**Mrs. Jablonski:** Well, thank you again for that question. I think the member will see that in the next few months we are going to have some allowances for the co-habiting spouse's income, which will be up to as much as \$2,500, and those spouses are also granted the medical benefits as are the children.

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

**Mr. Hehr:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. I'm

pleased that yesterday the government introduced increased tax credits for individuals who are disabled but still able to work. However, why are they still not recognizing those people who are severely handicapped to the point where they are unable to work by increasing their benefits to a more dignified level?

**Mrs. Jablonski:** Once again, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to point out that our AISH benefits are among the very best in this country and that the benefits include far more than just the money that we grant each month. I understand the member's concern, and it's something that I will consider in the next few months.

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

#### Property Taxes

**Ms DeLong:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs regarding education property taxes collected by the province from municipalities. Do city of Calgary taxpayers pay more in education property taxes than its school boards receive?

**Mr. Danyluk:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I guess that the quick answer would be no. We are collecting approximately \$542 million from taxation from the city of Calgary. An accessible, equitable system is very important not only to this government but to Albertans. The two boards in Calgary receive in the neighbourhood of \$1.2 billion.

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

**Ms DeLong:** Thank you very much. Also for the Minister of Municipal Affairs: why are property taxes increasing in Calgary?

**Mr. Danyluk:** Well, thank you very much for the question. Mr. Speaker, let me clarify that the tax rate, or the mill rate, is not increasing. There has been an increase in growth: more businesses, more properties. Increased value has led to a higher assessment in Calgary.

**Ms DeLong:** To the same minister: is the government planning to phase out education property taxes?

**Mr. Danyluk:** Well, Mr. Speaker, the quick answer is no. We feel that the current system is the best option. It provides a stable revenue. This investment goes right back to the communities. We're growing Alberta's future doctors, pharmacists, farmers, teachers. Just to add: roughly 31 per cent of education revenue comes from property taxes, and of course 69 per cent comes from general revenue.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

#### Social Services Agencies

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government has finally provided significant increases in the budget for some of its most vulnerable citizens, its children. In so doing, I wish to acknowledge the tireless, selfless advocacy of Weslyn Mather, the former MLA for Edmonton-Mill Woods, who for the past three and a half years pushed this government to support children, their families, and care providers. Although the emphasis placed on children is encouraging in this year's fiscal plan, there is once again little attention paid to

the adult programs. To the Minister of Children and Youth Services: when is this government going to address the crisis faced across the human resources sector?

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

**Ms Tarchuk:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to recognize the efforts of Weslyn Mather. She was a wonderful advocate.

You're talking about contracted agencies, I'm sure, with that question. Again, contracted agencies deliver a very important part of our services, in fact 25 per cent. I was really pleased that earlier this year we rolled out a 5 per cent increase to the contracted agencies. Yesterday's budget again gave another 5 per cent, and we have budgeted next year for 5 per cent. I'll continue to work with our contracted agencies.

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

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you very much. With inflation running higher, people are barely able to keep up. In November, after a small injection of funds was announced and subsequently denounced by a contracted agency as being a drop in the bucket, the Minister of Children and Youth Services said that she was working with contracted agencies and going through the budget process in terms of narrowing the gap. The minister has just indicated 5 per cent increases. Question: why have we not seen the results of those negotiations for all contracted agencies in this year's budget?

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

**Ms Tarchuk:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I think we have. You're right; I did say that back in the fall. I met with our contracted agencies just two weeks ago. I made the commitment that I'll continue to work with them. We identified the injection that was needed last fall, rolled it out in January. We are monitoring the impact of that. Yesterday we rolled out another 5 per cent, and for the first time ever we've budgeted into the future another 5 per cent for the contracted agencies.

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

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you. These contracted agencies need stability. Instead of continually putting the resolution of this crisis to a later date, will the minister commit to instating annual inflation-proof funds for all human contracted services through their agencies?

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

**Ms Tarchuk:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do agree that this sector does deserve stability. We are having discussions in terms of long-term solutions with other departments that do have contracted agencies. Again, recognizing the need for stability – it's so important – in next year's budget we have announced the 5 per cent.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

### Income Support Levels

**Ms Notley:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday's budget saw record spending but did almost nothing for Albertans who need help the most. While the government offers a billion dollar tax break on

royalties, hides \$5.5 billion in revenue, they expect the disabled to have their needs met with a \$38 a month increase and income assistance recipients to make do with even less. My question is to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. Could she or any other member of her cabinet survive on \$1,088 per month, and if not, how does she expect the disabled to?

2:20

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

**Mrs. Jablonski:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In the budget yesterday there was an overall increase to this area of my department of about 10.7 per cent. While the increase has to go to growing numbers in our society who are in need of care, once again I'd like to emphasize that it's not just the money amount that we give to our AISH clients. It's also the medical care that we give them and all the other coverage that's so important as well as the ability for them to apply for housing supplements.

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

**Ms Notley:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. I'm wondering if the minister could tell us if he or any member of his cabinet could survive on the \$402 per month that income support recipients receive, and if not, how does he expect those recipients to make ends meet?

**Mr. Goudreau:** Mr. Speaker, we are adding to our budget for income support to maintain our current caseloads. We're increasing our dollars to keep pace with the increases in both inflation and population growth. We are providing additional support to those Albertans that are in need. We help them with additional training. We help them with the employment challenges that they have. As well, we're looking at increasing the Alberta child health benefit and the Alberta adult health benefit programs.

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

**Ms Notley:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the President of the Treasury Board: given that yesterday's budget hit \$5.5 billion in revenues, why won't the government consider raising AISH and income support rates to a livable level?

**Mr. Snelgrove:** Mr. Speaker, the hon. ministers have pointed out time and time again that AISH is simply not the only support program that we have for those who need more. We have \$76 million more for affordable child care. We have \$46 million more for affordable supportive housing for low income, \$58 and a half million for housing targeted to lower income, \$41 million more for increased support to contracted agencies. No province cares more or does more for those who really need their help.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

### Recycling

**Mr. Denis:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think every member of this Assembly would agree we live in a beautiful province and, I'd say, particularly in the constituency of Calgary-Egmont. This notwithstanding, I have a question for the Minister of Environment. I was a little bit concerned today when I learned by way of the 2008 Environment Conference held here in Edmonton

that 818 kilograms of waste is produced per person per year in this province. In fact, we have the dubious distinction of leading the country in this regard. I'd be interested to know what we're doing to move us out of this first place distinction.

**Mr. Renner:** Well, Mr. Speaker, statistics often are sources of pride, and I have to admit that as Minister of Environment this is a statistic that none of us should be taking any particular pride in. We have with our waste reduction strategy put in place a goal to reduce that number from 800 to 500 kilograms per person by 2010. But let me be honest: it's going to be a challenge. We are going to have to work very aggressively as government, our municipal governments, and as individuals to achieve that.

**Mr. Denis:** Mr. Speaker, my first supplemental is to the same minister. For a while our government has been reviewing beverage container recycling regulations. When can we expect some movement or announcement on this issue?

**Mr. Renner:** Mr. Speaker, we should be taking some pride in our beverage container recycling program. It is one of the most successful programs, but that doesn't mean that there's not room for improvement. We recycle about 75 per cent of our beverage containers, and our goal is to increase that to 85 per cent. As you know, this issue has been under consideration by an all-party committee. There are other considerations that are before me and my ministry at this point in time, and we hope to have updated regulations in place later on this year.

**Mr. Denis:** A final supplemental to the same minister, Mr. Speaker. With our booming economy, indeed, anybody that takes a trip to downtown Calgary or Edmonton can see that construction and demolition are our major industries right now. Waste is obviously a large factor in these areas of the economy. What is the minister doing to limit the amount of typical waste from construction or demolition in our landfill?

**Mr. Renner:** Mr. Speaker, I've had numerous meetings of late with the Alberta Construction Association and other representatives of the construction industry, and I want to say that they really are prepared to take the initiative to move forward on a construction and demolition waste reduction program. In that regard, we hope to have a final agreement in place and implement waste reduction for construction and demolition by this fall.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

#### Highway Maintenance

**Mr. Kang:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have been asking questions about the privatization of highway maintenance for the past two days with no credible answers, so I'm going to try again. Yesterday I asked the hon. Minister of Transportation how maintenance companies are paid, and the minister responded by saying that they don't get paid unless they are out on the road. He was also unclear as to whether it was by the kilometre or mile or by the hour. To the Minister of Transportation: can the minister clarify whether the payment is on a per kilometre basis – we use kilometres in Alberta or miles – or whether it is on a per hour basis? Do these private contractors receive nothing when they are sitting in the shop? Is that true?

**Mr. Snelgrove:** You know, I have probably a little better knowledge of this than most, for in fact, Mr. Speaker, back when the government first privatized the snowplow trucks, I threw out my dollars and bought one and went to work for the government. I can tell you that from that point of view the government was pretty tight with their money. Unless you were out working and monitored by the supervisor of that area, you were not getting paid. However, there was a standby amount allowed for trucks in case there was no snow. Lucky enough for us to have no snow. The trucks are paid by the hour. There is an allowance for blade use by the kilometre.

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

**Mr. Kang:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I previously asked the minister to undertake a review of private road maintenance to ensure value for the money, but the minister apparently thinks that Albertans should just, from yesterday's *Hansard*, "take my word for it." I'm asking the minister again if he will undertake an independent review of these contracts and then report to the people he works for, the Albertans. We require hard facts, not your word, Mr. Minister.

**Mr. Snelgrove:** Well, I can say this, Mr. Speaker. If the hon. Minister of Transportation gives me his word on it, I know darn well that you can take that to the bank. But we monitor this cost continually. We are a government that prides itself on reviewing their expenses and comparing them every year, every quarter to ensure that we are getting value for the money. It's difficult to bring up after a snowstorm like we've had and the work that our staff and private contractors have put in to keep the highways safe that this would be a time to question their commitment to the process.

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

**Mr. Kang:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't think the highway was safe. If the highway was safe, there would be no deaths on the highway. Given that yesterday the minister stated in this House that there were 500 vehicles available to get out to work but wouldn't provide any details, instead stating that we should just take his word for it, I'm asking the minister to tell us exactly how many vehicles from the fleet of 500 were out on the job this past week.

**Mr. Snelgrove:** You know, I guess it would be nice to have the time to rent a helicopter and fly around Alberta and count the people all out working so that we could have a daily count of the trucks out plowing snow in Alberta. Mr. Speaker, realistically, these corporations keep track of the cost and time spent. They report that at the end of the month through the billing cycle that they do. If the hon. member – and I'm sure he will – would like to put all the staff through the expense to go back to the day he asked and say, "Will you please forward contracts of all the trucks that were working," they'd be happy to forward it to his office.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

#### Provincial Environmental Initiatives

**Mr. Weadick:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government talks about making environmental issues a priority in news releases and in speeches, yet around the world people are doubtful of Alberta's reputation to take real actions to protect our environment. My first question is to the Minister of Environment. How has Alberta shown that it takes its role as an environmental steward seriously?

**Mr. Renner:** Well, Mr. Speaker, this government believes that actions speak louder than words. I want to talk about some of the actions that this government has taken with respect to the environment. The first Legislature in North America to introduce greenhouse gas regulations, we introduced the Water for Life program, which is recognized as world-class, leading legislation. We have stringent water management – again, world-class, leading regulations – on the Athabasca River, and we have introduced . . .

**The Speaker:** I'm sure we'll have a chance to hear more.

**Mr. Weadick:** Mr. Speaker, my first supplemental is to the same minister. Climate change is front and centre in your department's budget, yet critics contend that Alberta's strategy to deal with it will not do enough. Can the minister explain what this funding will do?

2:30

**Mr. Renner:** Well, Mr. Speaker, the climate change strategy, that we introduced last fall, recognizes that in order for us to seriously take on this issue of climate change and greenhouse gas emissions, we're going to have to invest in and implement a significant amount of technology, and what you're seeing in our budget is the first of many steps to do just that.

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

**Mr. Weadick:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental is to the Minister of Infrastructure. What is this government doing to reduce the environmental impact of our own building operations?

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

**Mr. Hayden:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over 10 years ago the Alberta government, in fact, implemented a program to reduce our environmental footprint from our operations. Our energy retrofit initiative has reduced electricity consumption by approximately 10 per cent for our operations, and since 2005 more than 90 per cent of electricity used by the government facilities comes from green sources such as wind power and biomass. We've reduced our greenhouse gas emissions from our buildings by 220,000 tonnes annually.

**The Speaker:** I certainly hope the minister is not suggesting, because there are countless numbers of light bulbs burned out in here, that this Assembly is contributing to that reduction of power consumption.

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

**Ms Pastoor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm sure that the next light bulbs that will go up there will be environmentally friendly light bulbs.

### Police Officer Supply

**Ms Pastoor:** Yesterday the minister of finance informed Alberta that it will receive more front-line police officers. Today officers from both Calgary's and Edmonton's police forces noted that nearly 40 extra, much-needed police recruits will be on the streets in each city this year alone. Could the Solicitor General explain how the policing needs of the Lethbridge Regional Police Service and our other small municipal policing agents can be met with a hundred additional police officers when two-thirds of these positions are accounted for in our two largest cities?

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

**Mr. Lindsay:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member is accurate in her mathematics. We did have a hundred new positions, and the good news is that those hundred new positions are going to be filled. The reason that the per cents turned out the way they are is because it's based on the per cent of police officers that are in those jurisdictions. For example, we had three conditions that policing agencies had to meet to qualify. One was that they had to be at full allotment, and the second one was that they had to have the ability to train those officers in this coming year. Lethbridge, for example, chose not to apply this year.

**Ms Pastoor:** Gosh, that opens it up for discussion about the police academy.

The province has pledged to maintain this funding to ensure that 300 new police officers are in our communities within the next three years. Mr. Speaker, with a projected population increase of a hundred thousand why does the Solicitor General believe that 300 new recruits are sufficient to address rising crime rates?

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

**Mr. Lindsay:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hundred that came out in the budget, of course, are the hundred that the Premier and our government promised, and we're delivering on that. Not included in that total is a number of new RCMP officers we're putting in under the provincial police agreement, which is in addition to that, so there certainly will be more than a hundred. I'd like to remind the hon. member that within the last four years we now have 600 additional police officers on the streets in Alberta.

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

**Ms Pastoor:** Mr. Speaker, thank you for that. That just happens to fit in nicely.

Alberta has been told that 65 new sheriffs are expected and budgeted for 2008. Can the Solicitor General tell me why \$12 million hasn't been earmarked for real police officers, who answer to the public?

**Mr. Lindsay:** Well, Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member is suggesting that the sheriffs, who are improving the safety on our highways, don't answer to the public, we certainly haven't got that feedback in my ministry. There are only 20 new sheriffs that are going to be engaged in highway safety patrols this year.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-East, followed by the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

### Health Care Premiums

**Mr. Amery:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are to the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness. Yesterday's provincial budget deserves the utmost praise in announcing the elimination of Alberta health care premiums for all Albertans three years ahead of schedule. That is what you call underpromising and overdelivering. What is the Minister of Health and Wellness intending to do with the arrears that are owed by some Albertans to Alberta Health and Wellness?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister. [interjection] The hon. minister has the floor.

**Mr. Liepert:** Well, Mr. Speaker, there's no question that Albertans heartily endorsed the promise of this government in the last election campaign to eliminate health care premiums. I think that those

members in this House heard our constituents say, "Let's get rid of them as soon as we can," and the finance minister announced that yesterday. However, it should be made clear that the elimination of health care premiums does not take effect until the 1st of January 2009, so health care premiums will still have to be paid by those who were paying them for the remainder of this calendar year.

**The Speaker:** Thank you.  
The hon. member.

**Mr. Amery:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: will Albertans continue to be billed for those benefits such as Alberta Blue Cross, which provides extended coverage for prescription drugs, vision, and dental care?

**The Speaker:** That's much better.  
The hon. minister.

**Mr. Liepert:** Yes, Mr. Speaker, we do have the supplementary health plan, that covers such things as prescription drugs, eyeglasses, and dental care for Albertans, and those premiums will still be paid by Albertans.

Just to conclude the answer to the first question, relative to unpaid health care premiums, like any other debt that is owed, for health care premiums that have not been paid, the appropriate action will have to be taken.

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

**Mr. Amery:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: does the end of premiums mean that the way we register for health care also has changed?

**Mr. Liepert:** Well, Mr. Speaker, that's a very important question because while the health care premiums were a source of revenue, it was also the manner by which we registered all Albertans under the health care plan. Just because we will be eliminating health care premiums doesn't mean to say that we don't have to have in place a registration system to ensure that those who are eligible to be covered by Alberta health care are and that those who are not eligible will not be covered.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, followed by the hon. Member for Strathcona.

### Water Management

**Mr. Jacobs:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we know, Alberta's rapid population and economic growth has led to significant water supply challenges for rural communities across the province, especially in southern Alberta. My question to the Minister of Environment: what is being done to address the challenges that rural communities face with water allocation as their communities develop?

**Mr. Renner:** Mr. Speaker, I want to assure the hon. member that managing our water resources is a priority for this government. As a matter of fact, it's increasingly more important over time. Obviously, the most efficient and effective way to deal with water constraint problems is through conservation and efficiency programs, but at the end of the day we're all going to have to do a much better job of managing the way we allocate the water, and over time we'll have to develop better and new tools to assist us in the allocation of those water resources.

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

**Mr. Jacobs:** Thank you. My first supplementary to the same minister: what is this government doing to improve water management in Alberta, especially in southern Alberta?

**Mr. Renner:** Mr. Speaker, as you know, I mentioned in response to another question that we've introduced a program called the Water for Life program. The Water for Life program deals with a broad gamut of issues related to water. It's recently been under review by the Alberta Water Council, and frankly we now have to begin the process of developing and making those very difficult decisions as we move forward and ensure that we use the finite resource of water to its highest capacity.

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

**Mr. Jacobs:** Thank you. Many of my constituents in rural communities have trouble with water supply in the summer months. To the same minister: what is this government doing to improve water storage on the Milk River, which would help alleviate water shortage concerns that these communities have?

**Mr. Renner:** Well, the Milk River is a somewhat unique situation because it is one of the rivers in Alberta that both the U.S. and Canadian sides are jointly responsible for. We have the Milk River Watershed Council, that is a leading basin management system. In conjunction with that council we are developing programs that support water conservation and efficiency not only in the Milk but throughout southern Alberta.

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

### 2:40 Cumulative Environment Effects

**Mr. Quest:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again we have seen yet another company hold an open house to tell residents about plans to build an upgrader in the Industrial Heartland. To the Minister of Environment: what is Alberta going to do to ensure that the environment will be protected during this period of increasing development?

**Mr. Renner:** Mr. Speaker, we already have the strongest environmental protection legislation in Canada, but we need to do more, and we will. We're committed to managing this project and others like it through the cumulative effects regime, which is based upon determining outcomes and then working backwards and determining: what are the steps and decisions and regulations that are necessary to ensure that we achieve those outcomes?

**Mr. Quest:** Mr. Speaker, my first supplemental to the same minister. The need to make this model part of regular business was raised Tuesday during a panel at Alberta's environment conference. Given that we expect production in the oil sands to double by 2020, will Alberta require new oil sands development to follow the same cumulative effects model?

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

**Mr. Renner:** Yes, Mr. Speaker. In fact, we have already included other projects in the cumulative effects model, including the east-central Alberta proposal for gasification in coal as well as the oil sands region. We'll be setting firm targets for air, water, land, and ensure that our legislation will protect the environment while allowing and encouraging sustainable growth.

**The Speaker:** That expires the time for question period. There were 106 questions and answers.

## Tabling Returns and Reports

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

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today pursuant to Standing Order 59.02(2) and (3) to table for the information of the House a memorandum that I've written to the House leader for the Official Opposition and the House leader for the third party indicating our concurrence on a schedule for Committee of Supply.

For the information of the House the Committee of Supply will be called commencing tomorrow with the Department of Education and then, following that, on afternoons and evenings throughout the next few weeks. On Monday evening Aboriginal Relations would be called, on Tuesday afternoon Seniors and Community Supports, and on Tuesday evening Energy. Other information, of course, will be available in the House, but I thought it was prudent to let people know the first ones being called because they won't see it on the Order Paper that quickly. I'd table the requisite copies for the information of the House.

**Mr. Goudreau:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to table copies of our guidebook for temporary foreign workers. This guide provides temporary foreign workers with information on Alberta's employment standards, workplace health and safety, and the services available to them. This booklet, like the services provided through our temporary foreign workers advisory offices, is available in multiple languages, in this case French, German, Chinese, Spanish, and English. We're also working with Canadian visa posts overseas and with our federal partners and with employers to ensure that these guides get into the hands of the workers who need them.

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

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Echoing the considered comments of the Member for Calgary-Mackay, it is with great sadness that we note the passing of a tireless environment advocate, Martha Kostuch. Martha worked with numerous organizations, including the Clean Air Strategic Alliance, the Alberta Wilderness Association, the Prairie Acid Rain Coalition, and Friends of the Oldman River. We applaud the Alberta government for setting up a bursary in her name for a new course on consensus building.

**The Speaker:** What does that have to do with Tabling Returns and Reports? That's a statement.

### Tablings to the Clerk

**The Clerk:** I wish to advise the House that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of the hon. Mr. Horner, Minister of Advanced Education and Technology, pursuant to the Apprenticeship and Industry Training Act the Alberta Apprenticeship and Industry Training Board 2006-2007 annual report.

### Statement by the Speaker

#### Committee of Supply Procedure

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, a few minutes ago the hon. Government House Leader advised the Assembly that Committee of Supply would be called tomorrow, Thursday, April 24, 2008, to consider main estimates. At this time the chair wants to outline the rules concerning officials and staff on the floor of the Legislative Assembly. Members who were here last spring for the main

estimates may recall the practice of government officials on the floor of the Assembly to assist their respective ministers. While the practice this year is similar, there are some differences, of which members and ministers should take note.

First, the practice of allowing officials on the floor of the Assembly is permitted under the temporary standing orders approved by the Assembly last Thursday, April 17. Temporary Standing Order 59.01(3) states:

During Committee of Supply consideration of main estimates,

- (a) officials of the Government may be admitted to the floor of the Assembly to advise the Minister whose estimates are under consideration, and
- (b) staff of the opposition may also be admitted to assist Members who are participating in estimates consideration, provided that at least 24 hours' written notice of the names of the officials or staff is given to the Clerk.

There is no restriction on the number of officials or staff who may attend, but members should be aware that, unlike last year, there is no relaxation this year of the quorum rule, so there will likely be fewer seats for officials to occupy than was the case last year. Accordingly, any official seated in the chair of a member who wishes to occupy his or her chair must yield the seat immediately. The chair reminds members that even in committees they must speak and vote from their own seats. This requirement may mean that additional chairs will have to be brought in to accommodate the officials and staff so that they can sit in close proximity to the minister or member they are assisting, but it may very well be that those officials will be sitting in the back of this Assembly.

Of course, officials or staff may not speak on the minister's or member's behalf or otherwise participate in the debate. Officials and staff must meet the accepted dress standard for access to the Chamber. The use of cellular phones or the telephone mode of any personal digital appliance is prohibited for officials and staff as it is for members. They may use laptop computers or other personal digital appliance functions in support of their respective minister or member. Access to the Internet or department intranet will not, however, be provided.

The names and titles of officials or staff who will be attending the Chamber must be provided in writing 24 hours in advance. This notice should be directed to the Clerk and sent to room 315 of the Legislature Building, with a copy to the Sergeant-at-Arms in room 411. As estimates will be considered tomorrow, the chair will relax the 24-hour rule, but the names should be provided as soon as possible and prior to the officials or staff requesting access to the Chamber. This will not be enforced as a result of the situation tomorrow but will be effective the next day.

The chair would ask that ministers make their officials aware of this statement.

To all private members who recently received correspondence from me with respect to professional development opportunities: that briefing will occur at 5:30 tonight in the Carillon Room.

### Orders of the Day

#### Government Motions

7. Mr. Hancock moved:  
Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly resolve itself into Committee of the Whole, when called, to consider certain bills on the Order Paper.

**The Speaker:** This is not a debatable motion, hon. members, so I'll call the question.

[Government Motion 7 carried]

**The Speaker:** The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Official and Loyal Opposition.

### Provincial Fiscal Policies

10. Ms Evans moved:

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

[Adjourned debate April 22: Dr. Taft]

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise to respond to the budget that was presented and tabled in this Assembly yesterday.

I will begin my comments by expressing, as I did with the media yesterday, my real satisfaction that this budget will eliminate health care premiums. That's a policy that we've supported for many, many years. It's a shift in this government's policy that began through the last election campaign, when the proposal was put forward to eliminate health care premiums over the course of four years. [interjection] I'm getting comments from the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. He and I actually have a bit of a history on this issue because to his credit he stood up in this Assembly when he was the Member for Edmonton-Manning and took his own government to question over the desire to and the wisdom of eliminating health care premiums. He was ahead of the curve. Congratulations to him on that.

2:50

The elimination of health care premiums is something that's going to benefit all Albertans. I look forward, if we'll ever see the information, to knowing how much of that \$900 million or so a year – I know it's in the budget rounded up to a billion, but it will be less than that – what percentage of that actually is paid for by the provincial government through its own employees, through school boards and municipalities and health care systems, because I have a feeling that we were recycling an awful lot of public money in those health care premiums. I commend the government for eliminating health care premiums, and we will support that enthusiastically.

I would like to shift away from the specifics in my comments on the budget to talk about the broader issue, the broader concern around how we are managing this wealth, this incredible wealth we have in Alberta. I think it's very easy to take Alberta's wealth for granted. We forget how enormous it actually is and how fortunate we really are. I've said this a number of times in the past. We live in an area in Alberta, a geographic area, about equivalent to the size of France or the size of Texas. In that area you can take everybody from Fort Chip in the north to Coutts on the U.S., Montana border and put them in one city. We think that we have big cities in Alberta, but you put all of Alberta in one city – Edmonton, Calgary, Red Deer, and so on – and it's about the population of Seattle or Montreal, so it's not really a large population. That population enjoys incredible wealth, and we as members of this Assembly are stewards of that wealth in very important ways.

We have, of course, coal resources, forestry resources, agriculture resources. In some areas we have water. We have tourism resources. We have a wonderful, well-educated population. On top of all of that, of course, we have what really sets Alberta apart from other jurisdictions, which is our incredible wealth of oil and gas. You put all that together, and you realize that all of that wealth is shared among a population about the size of Montreal, considerably smaller than Toronto. You realize per capita how fortunate we really are. You also realize the responsibility that that places on us to make sure that we handle that wisely, that we don't become complacent or sloppy or careless in how we manage that.

A couple of years ago, Mr. Speaker, I did some work just comparing Alberta's petroleum wealth per capita to other jurisdictions around the world, just to put it in perspective, and I will see if I can dig up that information. Actually, I have it here. I'm going to just quote from this source, and the quote goes like this: Alberta's petroleum riches are even more impressive when measured against Alberta's small population; on a per capita basis Alberta has 51,900 barrels of recoverable oil reserves, tops in the world. In other words, for our small population, per capita we have the largest oil reserves in the world. Second is Kuwait, then the United Arab Emirates, and then Qatar. Saudi Arabia, which we always assume is incredibly wealthy in petroleum, actually ranks fifth on a list of petroleum wealth per capita. Alberta ranks first. I think that's something we should all remember when we're weighing out how we manage this wealth. Now, that's just oil reserves. If you add in natural gas reserves, our wealth rises even higher. Natural gas reserves are almost 57 trillion cubic feet, and there's perhaps another 500 trillion cubic feet of coal-bed methane. So we have here staggering wealth.

My challenge, then, to us and to this government is to manage that wealth wisely. I look at this budget, and I ask myself: are we living up to that standard? To me the answer is clearly: no, we're not. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre asked a question in question period today: where are the savings? Where's the plan in this budget to convert some of that nonrenewable wealth we've got in such glorious abundance into something permanent? It's very clear when you read the document that there isn't a plan.

Now, the President of the Treasury Board, who responded, promised there'll be a plan forthcoming. I look forward to that plan. Maybe it will reflect the Alberta Liberals' position, which seems to be the source of so many ideas that this government is using these days. Good on you. [interjection] Yeah. Somebody over there conceded that they ran out of ideas, and I think that may be true. There are a whole bunch of ideas I noticed, you know. Having a department of aboriginal affairs or a department focused on culture: those are Liberal ideas. Another idea in here, the R and D tax credit, came from the Alberta Liberal caucus, and on and on it goes.

Anyways, Mr. Speaker, I look forward to seeing what plan this government brings forward for savings. But in this budget it's the same approach that we've seen for far too long from this government, which is no plan for savings, and the results of that are shocking. I think the most obvious result of that is the value of the heritage trust fund, which was set up over 30 years ago. It was set up to be a savings vehicle for the people of Alberta, and in real terms the Alberta heritage fund today is worth less than it was 20 years ago. I think that's shameful.

We are liquidating the wealth of this province just about as fast as it can humanly be done. You can see that in the overheated economy. You see that in the labour shortages. You see that in the consuming of the environment. We're liquidating our wealth as quickly as we can do it. We can't do it any faster – can we? – because we can't get the people here, can't get the equipment here. We're selling our wealth as quickly as is humanly possible, and what's the long-term result of that? Where are the savings? Where is the wealth that's going to be there for our grandchildren and beyond?

Of course, it's said many times that Alberta has fallen behind other jurisdictions on this measure, and it's very true. I fully acknowledge that each jurisdiction is different and has different priorities, but when you look across the globe, you see that Alaska has a strategy for saving its petroleum wealth and converting it into something permanent, Norway does, Russia does, and several Middle Eastern countries do. Then you look at Alberta and you go through this budget and you don't see that plan. You don't see that

plan. That is, in my view, the fatal shortfall of this budget, Mr. Speaker. There's no provision. There's nothing in here that says that 30 per cent or 20 per cent or 1 per cent of our nonrenewable – and I emphasize “nonrenewable” – resource wealth will be saved for the future. It's not there.

Now, it could be there, Mr. Speaker. We've worked very hard on developing that option. But I think before we go to the future, it's worth perhaps looking a little bit at the past. How much nonrenewable resource wealth has flowed through this province's treasury since this government was first elected? It's a staggering amount. It would now be well over the \$200 billion mark. If you go back, you can itemize it through the years, starting in the 1970s and moving up. There are many individual years when as much as \$10 billion or more in one year of nonrenewable resource wealth flows through this government's hands. Yet the heritage fund today, if you liquidated it entirely, wouldn't finance six months of government operations.

3:00

It is very much, Mr. Speaker, like this government believes it won the great big lottery of all time, and in many ways it did, but instead of doing what every reasonable and well-informed financial adviser would recommend, which is to save some of that, we're spending it as fast as we can, and that is a mortal danger to the future of this province.

What this budget indicates is that we have become addicted to the process of liquidating our capital. This government has become addicted to it. There is actually an enormous gap, which we call a sustainability gap, between what this government brings in in reliable sources of revenue – I'm talking there about taxes, federal transfers, fees and premiums, and so on, things that every other provincial government has to rely on so heavily – a gap between all of those permanent and secure sources of revenue and how much is being spent. We haven't had time, since this budget just came out yesterday, to work out the size of the gap in this budget, but based on previous years, I'm sure that it's grown. It's probably over \$2,000 per person, the gap between what we're spending and what we're bringing in in sustainable revenue. The only way we're able to cover that gap is by spending our petroleum wealth, our nonrenewable petroleum wealth.

This is a dangerous, dangerous pattern, and it's a pattern that's been building now for many years with this government: spend more than you bring in and make up the difference by selling part of the farm. Well, at some point we're not going to be able to do that, and we've learned that lesson historically. The Minister of Energy is snickering at this analogy. Well, maybe that's the difference between your government's position and mine and this caucus's position.

History will tell us that, in fact, there's a real danger here. We learned that lesson 20 years ago when the world price of oil dropped below \$10 and we were as a government massively dependent on those nonrenewable resource revenues. When they dried up, what did we have to do? We had to make dramatic cuts to public services, we had to increase taxes, we had to lay off thousands of people, and we went into a prolonged economic slowdown. We're on the same course again, and this budget reinforces and, in fact, amplifies that course. That's my single biggest concern with this budget, Mr. Speaker.

Now, the amazing thing and what frustrates me so much with this government is that we are at a spectacular moment of opportunity right now in which we could have the best of everything in Alberta, and many people have done the numbers to demonstrate this. When I say the best of everything, what do I mean? Well, we could have low taxes, competitive taxes, as we do. We could have top-quality

public services, which in some ways we do but far too few ways, and it's not because we're not spending enough. It's because, in my view and many other people's view, we're not managing effectively.

The third thing that we could have and do so well at this moment in history is save. We can have competitive taxes, and at the same time we can spend on generous public services, and at the same time we can save. How is that possible? It's possible because of what I said a few minutes ago. Nowhere on earth is there such a small population with such an abundance of wealth. We stand unparalleled in opportunity. As I said, look at the Middle East. Look at the incredible energy kingdoms of the Middle East. They don't even compare per capita to what we have in Alberta.

And what are we doing with it? There are still dozens of neighbourhoods in Calgary where instead of a school there's an empty field that says: future site of school. I challenge all of you – and I'm serious about this – to walk through the neighbourhoods of Edmonton or Calgary or any other significant settlement in this province. Walk through the neighbourhoods that were built in 1910, and you'll come on a school; in neighbourhoods built in the 1920s, and you'll come on a school. You go through neighbourhoods built in the '30s or '40s or '50s or '60s, every decade through the 1900s, and you can find a school. Until you hit the 1990s, until you hit the period when this government came to power. Then far too often – far too often – you come on a field that's intended for a school, but there's no school.

I ask all of you – this is just one example – how is it that as a society we could manage our wealth so well that in the midst of the incredible baby boom of the 1950s and '60s we could build schools, and in the midst of wartime we could build schools? No matter what the economy we could afford schools. Now we're scrambling to catch up, yet we've never been wealthier. That's just one indication, Mr. Speaker, of the mismanagement of this province's wealth and opportunity. Health care is another one, and on and on it goes.

I won't dwell on those specifically, but I do want to make the point in some detail, Mr. Speaker, that we could be saving. I'm going to cite some examples, and then I'm going to go into details, examples of who has confirmed this. Well, talk to the Alberta Chambers of Commerce. Go to their website. Look at their research. You'll find that they have done the numbers, and they have said that the Alberta government could be saving 30 per cent of royalties and doing very well. Then go and talk to the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Alberta. They will say the same thing. They've gone through the government's numbers, and they say that the government of Alberta could be saving 30 per cent for the future and doing no harm to the economy or to the government coffers.

Go to the Canada West Foundation. They've produced many terrific studies, and they're very keen on the notion of saving a portion, in fact 30 per cent, of nonrenewable resource revenues and building up the heritage fund. Talk to your former leader, the Hon. Peter Lougheed, or talk to Allan Warrack, who was a cabinet minister years ago in this government, or talk to any number of other people. They will all say that this government should be saving a set per cent, typically 30 per cent. Allan Warrack I think has said 40 or 50 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, entirely on our own we've taken our very tiny resources in the Alberta Liberal caucus and committed to doing the same analysis. We've run the numbers. We've looked at government spending. We've accounted for the variables, and we've come to the same conclusion: that this government could in fact take 30 per cent of nonrenewable resource revenues and systematically start saving that. It could do that – it could do that – without putting this budget into debt, without curtailing spending in any unreasonable manner, and without raising taxes.



**Mr. Knight:** He wants us to borrow money and spend it.

**Dr. Taft:** I'm getting more nattering from the Minister of Energy. I look forward to him rising when I'm done, and I'll try to answer his questions if they're well informed.

Mr. Speaker, I give you that list of sources, and I invite all government members to go and check them out: the Alberta Institute of Chartered Accountants, the Canada West Foundation, Alberta Chambers of Commerce, and ourselves.

Now, each of those groups has different ways of saving the 30 per cent. But what's really interesting when you look at this budget and you compare it to budgets from earlier, from the early 1980s and late 1970s, there were actually line items in these budgets where 30 per cent of resource revenues was actually channelled into the heritage fund. If anybody's interested, I could provide you with photocopies of those pages of those budgets from long ago where there was a line item of 30 per cent of royalties off the top, not from surpluses but off the top, that went into savings.

3:10

Now, our particular plan would have channelled those savings into a handful of priorities: one, of course, into the heritage fund. I think this would be a bold and exciting strategic direction for this government to take: to set the goal, to have a day when the heritage fund actually earns more money for the government of Alberta than oil and gas. And that's achievable. That's achievable if this government develops the discipline, listens to the advice of all these various organizations, and actually starts saving now. In fact, if you took 30 per cent of royalties and began building up the heritage fund, the day would come in about 20 years when the heritage fund was large enough that we were earning more from investments than from oil and gas.

That's what you call a strategy. You set a long-term goal, and you do it. This government had a strategy at one point, which was balancing the budget. We need a new strategy. We need a new purpose. The reason I think that purpose is so important is that we need to be setting aside wealth so that when revenues from oil and gas drop, we have something to fall back on. If we do that, then we can ensure that our taxes are permanently competitive and that the public services here will be permanently well funded.

Building up the heritage fund isn't the only priority that we have and that I'd like to see in a budget. Another one is investing in the long term, in the very things that make societies prosper in the long term, and that's education. I would have liked to have seen – and we've done the numbers on this; it could be done – a portion of that 30 per cent go into a postsecondary endowment fund, an endowment fund that was aimed at making the universities and colleges and technical schools in Alberta among the best in the world because long term our prosperity and success doesn't depend on oil and gas, and it won't be supported by tourism or forestry. In fact, none of us know what it will be supported by. But there is one thing that I can guarantee you: long term the success of Alberta will depend on a well-educated population.

So creating an endowment fund for postsecondary education is another way of securing the future, and it could be done. It could easily be done. This government took kind of a step in that direction a couple of years ago when its Bill 1 established – what was it called? The endowment fund for postsecondary education?

**Ms Blakeman:** Access to the future fund.

**Dr. Taft:** The access to the future fund. That's right. Bill 1.

It was going to establish a \$3 billion fund for postsecondary

education, a step in the right direction. In our view, not bold enough but a step. Sadly, that fund has not been filled. All the money that this government has had, and instead of living up to one of their biggest commitments and promises, they've – I don't know – let it dribble away.

In any case, establishing a terrific postsecondary endowment fund would help the universities of Alberta, Calgary, and Lethbridge and Athabasca and perhaps someday Mount Royal university take their places among the best in the world. If you look at Harvard and Yale and Cambridge and Oxford and so on, all of those huge generators of wealth and success for those countries, they all have enormous endowment funds. Alberta doesn't. Alberta doesn't even hold a candle to those, and we should. So that would be a second priority for us in a budget.

A third one would be to pay off one of the lingering debts that this government has. Now, I know everybody likes to think this government doesn't have debts, but actually it does. One of them is the infrastructure debt. We have multi multibillion dollar infrastructure debt that needs to be addressed. It's difficult to get from the government figures an exact knowledge of how big that infrastructure debt is, but it's certainly approaching and quite possibly exceeding \$10 billion. Why do people call that debt? Well, because in effect it's money owed. It's money that's going to be required to repair the roofs and the walls and the sewer systems and so on of the universities and of the provincial buildings and of all the provincial infrastructure that's required.

In our budget plans, which were laid out with very considerable care, we could also use a portion of those royalties to pay off the infrastructure debt and, when that's paid off, put that money into the heritage fund as well.

So my point to you, Mr. Speaker, is that if – if – there was a plan from this government in this budget to convert our nonrenewable wealth into something permanent, we would be well on the way as a province to a secure and prosperous future. As we are, we have a budget here today that doesn't have any of that sort of plan. In fact, if you go through the budget documents, you'll see that on the pages indicating the heritage fund you don't see any particular contribution to the heritage fund at all. Without that, we're setting ourselves up for a rude awakening, for a crash, and if history should have taught us anything, it's that we should be preparing for that day now, while we have the opportunity.

That's my greatest disappointment with this budget. My greatest satisfaction with the budget, as I said at the beginning, is that we're eliminating health care premiums. My greatest disappointment is that we're not saving for the future.

Now, there are, of course, many other specific items that will come up during budget debate. Some of those even have come up earlier today: concerns around support for people on AISH, which I think my colleague from Calgary-Buffalo raised in question period, concerns for child care. Again, we cannot go wrong by investing in child care. There's all kinds of evidence that if we put wealth and money into our children at the earliest ages, we'll reap all kinds of benefits when they become adults because they'll be making fewer demands on the justice system and because they will be more productive in the economy, and because they will live longer, healthier lives, they won't be making all kinds of demands on the health care system.

Now, I haven't gone through this in enough detail, and this will come out in budget debates, but as far as I could tell, there's nothing in this budget that will do something as basic as feed hungry kids in Alberta. Perhaps the Minister of Education can correct me if I'm wrong on this, but he well knows that in this Assembly a number of times for a number of years we've raised concern that Alberta stands

alone in this country as being the only province that doesn't specifically spend any money on school nutrition programs. I suppose, sadly, that's the same in this budget. What kind of short-sighted policy is that? What kind of people comprise this government caucus when they're prepared to allow thousands of children in Alberta to go to school hungry every day and not provide one dollar of support to feed them.

We have volunteers out there who are prepared to help prepare the meals, help feed the kids. I've helped with that. Other members of our caucus have helped with that. But at the end of the day the demand exceeds the supply, and we don't have any resources going to that from this government. A short short-sighted perspective from a government that has lost touch with what's going on in classrooms.

3:20

I was also, of course, very disappointed to see in this budget the significant line item – it's in the range of \$50 million – in support for the horse-racing industry. How is it that a province that says it's out of the business of business, that it's no longer picking winners and losers, can still find \$50 million or thereabouts to prop up the horse-racing industry?

**Mr. MacDonald:** How much?

**Dr. Taft:** It's about \$50 million. Fifty million dollars a year.

In fact, this government last year signed a 10-year deal with Horse Racing Alberta: a minimum of \$500 million to prop up horse racing. Now, I think that's shocking. I just think that's immoral. I have nothing against horse racing. I go to the races once in a while myself. I enjoy them. But just as every other business should stand on its own two feet – I go to the movies. I don't expect the movies to be supported by this government. I do all kinds of things and don't expect this government to be propping them up. I certainly don't expect this government to be propping up horse racing to the tune of \$50 million a year every year.

I was really disappointed to see that. When you put it in comparison to other expenditures, you realize how far out of whack that is. When we don't have \$50 to feed the kids who go to school hungry every day, but we have \$50 million to feed the racehorses, you wonder how confused this government's priorities are. They're obviously pretty confused.

Again, I noticed this government has plans in this budget for more police officers. How many is it per year? I think it's a hundred, increasing for the next three years, so a total increase of 300 police officers or peace officers or sheriffs; I'm not sure what exactly they are. Fine. That's good. That's a good idea. But what's the cost of that compared to horse racing? I hope members of that caucus go through and carefully listen to the arguments that are put to them for supporting horse racing and ask themselves: how long are we going to keep doing this as a government? Maybe we ought to start weaning horse racing and expect them over the course of three or four years to stand on their own four legs. Anyway, it's a disturbing indication of the confused priorities of this government.

Mr. Speaker, I cannot let this debate proceed without raising concerns about the quality of information that's brought to this Assembly in the form of financial documents. This was made a particular concern of mine after reading the Auditor General's report last October. The Auditor General raised in a number of cases concerns that information that was brought up through annual reports, particularly in the Ministry of Energy, presented to this government were not accurate reflections of what was going on within that government. We rely as MLAs on accurate information being brought to us so that we can hold the government to account,

so that we can manage this government properly. Sadly, the comments of the Auditor General really put into question the accuracy and quality of information brought to this Assembly in financial documents.

When I read the budget documents and now when I read annual reports from government departments, I'm concerned that the work of the Public Affairs Bureau is trumping sometimes the work of the people who actually want to prepare those documents and that when a government prepares submissions, those get laundered or spun by the Public Affairs Bureau. Maybe that's the reason that the Public Affairs Bureau is seeing such a significant increase in its budget in this particular year.

I think we should all be very, very skeptical of the work of the Public Affairs Bureau in massaging and managing the information that government MLAs get. I think it just might be the Public Affairs Bureau that writes some of their questions and also writes the answers for the ministers. It's the Public Affairs Bureau who combs through annual reports that come to us of all the departments, and it may well be the Public Affairs Bureau that's had a significant hand in preparing these budget documents. We need to be careful about the Orwellian effects of the Public Affairs Bureau because those are a threat to democracy.

**Mr. MacDonald:** What are some of those examples of Orwellian?

**Dr. Taft:** For example, saying something is true when it's not true or saying something is wonderful when it's not wonderful. There are all kinds of examples. The Public Affairs Bureau is the master of that. We won't go into more detail until we're here to debate that in committee.

Mr. Speaker, those are a handful of my opening comments on the budget that was presented yesterday: generally, a document that lacks any strategic vigour. It's a document that comes across as dull and directionless, a document and a budget that fails to set out any long-term plan at all. It doesn't say: our plan is to by such-and-such a year have a heritage fund that will replace oil and gas royalties. It doesn't say: our plan is to reduce the infrastructure debt to zero by such-and-such a date, or our plan is to ensure that there's a permanent endowment fund for our postsecondary institutions so that they can rival the best in the world by such-and-such a date. There's nothing like that.

There's no strategy here. It's a reflection of a government that's run out of sense of purpose, and it's a reflection of a government that can coast on Alberta's incredible wealth but is not doing anything to ensure that that incredible wealth will serve this wonderful province long into the future. It's a reflection of a government that has adopted a mentality of the big lottery winner that's having a good time, and to heck with tomorrow.

Mr. Speaker, I look forward over the coming days and weeks to detailed departmental debates. I hope the ministers will one by one answer the questions that we raise. We've had pretty good success at that in the past, and I hope that continues. I look forward to something new, and that would be the backbenchers of the government participating with great enthusiasm in the budget debates as we move forward. Too often – too often – we've seen multi multibillion dollar budgets for individual departments proceed through here, and not a single member of the government backbenchers has made one comment. I think that's regrettable because the people of Alberta then don't actually know where those individual members stand, and those individual members are failing to hold their government to account in any public manner.

So I hope we see a reinvigoration of debate on the floor of this Assembly when it comes to the budget. We will do our bit, but our

resources are tiny. I hope that each backbencher of this government does his or her bit as well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Hancock:** Mr. Speaker, I would move that we adjourn debate.

[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 22: Mr. Allred]

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

3:30

**Mr. Xiao:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a new member of this Assembly it's an honour for me to take this opportunity to respond to the Speech from the Throne and to provide some background information on myself as well as the Edmonton-McClung constituency. I would like to begin by congratulating you on your re-election and all my colleagues in this Assembly for achieving the opportunity to represent the people of Alberta. We have been bestowed with the trust of Albertans. They are expecting us to govern with honesty, integrity, and hard work. I look forward to working with each of my colleagues to provide the citizens of this province with the level of public service they seek.

A proud history of good governance is what makes this province one of the best places to live, work, and raise a family. I look forward to contributing positively toward the great tradition of the Progressive Conservative Party and the growing legacy of our current Premier. This tradition has been established by the hard work of many people over many years. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the people who helped me to get to this speech today, the volunteers who spend countless hours to preserve the democratic tradition. I would like to thank all the volunteers who serve on the Edmonton-McClung board and all of those who came out to support my bid to represent the Edmonton-McClung constituency.

Mr. Speaker, although Canada is not my country of birth, it is my country of choice. My experiences growing up in China have left me with a great deal of respect for the freedom that is enjoyed in Canada. After seeing this, I was convinced that moving my family to Edmonton would be the best decision I could make, and this decision was reinforced by my recent election victory and the opportunity it has given me to represent the people of Edmonton-McClung.

However, I would like to begin my comments with some of my life experiences in China because they have made me the person that I am today and will provide a great deal of insight into the values I bring to this job. Mr. Speaker, I was born in Guizhou province in the southwest of China. My father was an accountant in the coal mining industry. My mother was a schoolteacher. My father's parents passed away when he was only five years old, so he was raised by his older brother. During early China's Cultural Revolution my uncle was considered an antirevolutionary and was sent to

labour in the countryside for 10 years. He wasn't released until 1977. On my mother's side my grandparents owned land, making them the enemy of communism. As a result, we were treated like second-class citizens.

As a young boy I was denied many opportunities to get a proper education because I didn't belong to the right class. Only those children from a family background of peasants and workers could get preferential treatment. Instead, at the age of eight I was sent from southwest China back to the village my mother came from in northern China because they felt I would be a troublemaker. As a result, I lived a harsh life, alone for a year and a half. Mr. Speaker, this childhood experience has left a significant mark on my life and has taught me to be a hard worker and a highly motivated self-starter from an early age.

In those conditions it took hard work and determination just to survive, but in looking back, I was actually lucky in some ways. Since my mother was considered highly educated because she had a high school education, she became an elementary schoolteacher in Chinese literature. I was, therefore, lucky enough to receive very strong Chinese language training and to get a glimpse of the value of a good education. That exposure made me hungry for more. Being denied the opportunity to learn early fuelled my desire to work hard and to learn as much as I could. This is an important value that I bring to this job and an important lesson we must instill into our culture.

Mr. Speaker, as William Butler Yeats said, "Education is not filling a bucket, but lighting a fire." We must encourage and support that fire as it is the key to our continued prosperity. As China's Cultural Revolution came to an end after Mao's death, the rules in China began to loosen up. This allowed me to finally graduate from high school, which only made my thirst for knowledge stronger. I remember dreaming that I wanted to be a truck driver because it would give me the freedom to travel to faraway places and to get rare things like oranges and sugar canes.

As the reforms continued in China, I was able to advance my education, so I studied geology at the Beijing Coal Mining Institute. After that, I chose to study English from a radio program and from evening school. Later I got admitted to the Beijing Second Language Institute, where I received my BA in English literature. I then started working as a translator at the Science and Technology Exchange Centre with Foreign Countries in Hebei province. This job gave me the opportunity to see the western world and its values: freedom, democracy, and capitalism. This exposure ignited my passion towards capitalism, a passion that I continue to believe in very strongly, a passion that I will uphold as the representative for the Edmonton-McClung constituency.

As the opportunity to practise capitalism presented itself to me, I took full advantage and began dealing with a Singapore liquid air company to start a retail sales presence in China. I finally found commercial success as the only private liquid gas distribution agent in the country.

In 1988, since I spoke English well, I was asked to host a delegation of retired Canadians who were visiting China through an organization called Canadian Executive Service Organization, led by Mr. Keith Cumming, an Edmontonian who was the chairman of CESO, which organizes retired Canadians that want to help developing countries. I was later invited by this group to come to Edmonton as their guest at the organization's annual general meeting. This trip was how I got introduced to this great city of Edmonton, which changed my life forever.

When I returned to China, the Tiananmen protests had occurred, and I feared that China would abandon its reforms. Having tasted the freedom and the opportunities that Canada had to offer, I

immediately decided that I would move my family to Canada, to Edmonton. I contacted my friend Mr. Keith Cumming, who helped expedite my visa process. Eventually I was able to become a business immigrant. Since then, I've been involved in many business ventures, varying from international trade to publishing to commercial real estate investment and marketing. I studied economics at the University of Alberta. I also took business school at NAIT because I wanted to gain a better understanding of how business was done in the western world.

3:40

Mr. Speaker, I offer this extensive personal history because I want the people of Edmonton-McClung as well as the people in this Assembly to understand how seriously I respect the rich democratic history that I have been elected to uphold. I'm also confident that my diverse experience will serve my constituents well. I also offer this extensive background because I want the people of Edmonton-McClung to know that working hard is ingrained in my psyche and that hard work is what I plan to deliver as their MLA.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I want my constituents to know that I have always been a fighter because I want them to feel assured that I will fight for their interests and causes. These interests may be very diverse. Edmonton-McClung is one of Alberta's fastest growing constituencies, with predominantly middle-class families of diverse ethnic backgrounds.

The constituency was named after Nellie McClung, who is one of the Famous Five. Before I drafted this speech, I officially visited her. It was a very amazing moment for me, I want you to know. She was known as one of the most prominent leaders in the first wave of feminism, as an educator, a lecturer, an agent of change. She was a brave visionary who fought for equality and fairness. I'm honoured to be representing a constituency named after her.

Mr. Speaker, I spent a year door-knocking to win the nomination and, ultimately, the opportunity to represent Edmonton-McClung. From door to door, approximately 18,000 doors, I got to know and understand the people and the issues that concern them the most. My constituents are very concerned about the intersections on the southwest portion of Anthony Henday Drive. This along with the complaints about the traffic noise caused by the Henday was the number one issue raised on my journey. I pledge to my constituents that I will work with my colleagues to tackle this problem.

The communities west of Anthony Henday Drive are concerned with the lack of schools. The children have to cross two highways to make it to their classrooms. Mr. Speaker, the government has committed to getting these schools built, and I will work with the government to ensure that it comes through on this commitment in an expedient manner.

The people also told me that they are noticing that the city's infrastructure is in critical need of repair, so I committed to working with the Edmonton caucus as well as the capital region caucus to ensure that our beloved city gets the infrastructure funding that it needs to remain a world-class capital city.

Furthermore, the increasing level of crime and the lack of policing have become a growing concern. Although this is a matter of municipal jurisdiction, I will work with my colleagues to provide all municipalities with the funding needed to hire and train sufficient police to combat the increased crime.

Mr. Speaker, the constituents of Edmonton-McClung also expressed concerns with the lack of affordable housing and the escalating costs of postsecondary education.

All these important issues will take time to resolve, and I look forward to collaborating with my colleagues to address these issues with the best interests of Albertans and my constituents in mind.

Many of these issues have been identified in the Speech from the Throne, Mr. Speaker, which tells me that they are not unique to the people of Edmonton-McClung. With this in mind, I feel very confident that they will remain as the government's top priorities until they are resolved.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier has also given me an opportunity to serve the people of Alberta as the parliamentary assistant for Employment and Immigration. I will make the best of this opportunity to serve under the guidance of the hon. Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace.

The Speech from the Throne has identified broadening Alberta's economy as one of the government's top priorities. The government's goal of creating a new economic strategy that reflects new priorities, new needs, new opportunities for Alberta is to be applauded at a time of prosperity.

In good times it's easy to get complacent, but the Premier has the vision and tenacity to look beyond today to ensure a long-term sustainable future of our children and our grandchildren. I assure the Premier, the minister, the people of Alberta that my extensive life and business experience make me very confident in my ability to perform the duties assigned to me in Employment and Immigration. I look forward to the minister's guidance and direction, and I'm thankful for the opportunity to serve in this capacity.

Mr. Speaker, Sarah Caldwell said, "Learn everything you can, anytime you can, from anyone you can – there will always come a time when you will be grateful you did." Nicholas Butler said, "Optimism is . . . the foundation of courage." When I was a little boy in China, life was challenging. All I had was my courage and a strong work ethic. Every time I was given the opportunity to learn, my optimism grew. I moved to Canada, the land of opportunity. I have experienced a lot of things and learned from a lot of people. I am very optimistic about the future and the potential of our great province.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to end by thanking the most important people in my life – my wife, Alice; my two sons, Allen and Andrew; my parents; and my brother – for their continuous support and understanding. As we all know, running for public office is a tremendous commitment. One can only be successful with the love and the support of a wonderful family.

I want the constituents of Edmonton-McClung as well as the members of this Assembly to know that, most importantly, I'm doing this for the future of our children and of the generations to come.

Mr. Speaker, colleagues, and citizens of Alberta, thank you very much for the privilege of speaking here today and for the opportunity to serve as a member of this great Assembly.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, there was a little leverage given there by the chair. I think all of us who live in this country perhaps did not appreciate the stories that would come. I am so fascinated to hear these stories from individuals in their maiden speeches, some of the most spectacular ones I've ever heard in the 28, 29 years that I've been here.

To recognize the hon. member who has just spoken as the first person, to my knowledge, born in post-Communist China, after the revolution in 1949, ever to have been elected in a democratic institution anywhere outside of mainland China is quite provocative. Those of us who may have studied Chinese history will recognize the events that occurred after 1949. If you had an education and if you had property, you were declared enemies of the state. When you add the voluminous difficulty, I guess, with respect to the

Cultural Revolution, perhaps you have stories that the rest of us would never really quite understand.

That's not to suggest that only the Member for Edmonton-McClung has those stories. Other people have those stories as well. When I first heard the story from the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, as an example, to recognize Vietnam, the war, the boats, the journey across the ocean, the journey to Alberta and Canada: quite provocative.

I'm really moved, and I hope you don't mind, then, if I took advantage of the chair's position. But that would also mean we will eliminate the Q and A section for the five minutes.

Does the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona choose to participate? You have not yet, have you?

**Ms Notley:** Mr. Speaker, were you asking about a response or questions and answers?

**The Speaker:** No. Your maiden speech: have you provided it?

3:50

**Ms Notley:** No. I'm quite happy to proceed. I had hoped we might be able to do introductions.

**The Speaker:** You can introduce the guest, please, first of all, before you proceed with your speech.

**Ms Notley:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly a very good friend of mine who is here today on the eve of my maiden speech. Nicole Bownes is a very good friend and a member of a much-cherished profession. She's a community nurse. She also was a president of her community nursing local and sat on her provincial bargaining committee with the United Nurses. She ultimately became a staff member with me at the United Nurses. When I decided to run for office two years ago, she agreed to work on my campaign. She started knocking on doors with me two times a week no matter what the weather until such time as she realized it was easier to organize other people to do that for her. She went from that to becoming the volunteer co-ordinator for my campaign, and she played a key role in ensuring that I was elected. I would appreciate it now, Nicole, if you could please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by congratulating all members of the House on their election to the Assembly. I'd also like to congratulate the government for its victory in the election just past. They appear to have convinced an important number of Alberta voters that their party represents the best agent of the change sought after by so many. I can assure members of this Assembly that in the role of opposition member ongoing assessment of that claim is a task to which I will pay a great deal of attention.

I also want to thank the people of Edmonton-Strathcona for putting their faith in me and for casting their vote to ensure that a broad range of ideas and viewpoints will be discussed and challenged in this Assembly over the next four years. Edmonton-Strathcona has a long relationship with the NDP. Most recently, in addition to accounting for the presence in this Legislature of two important figures from the Alberta left, lawyers Gordon Wright and Barrie Chivers, Edmonton-Strathcona elected Raj Pannu to the Legislature in three successive elections. I'm honoured to say that I was very involved in all three of those campaigns.

Raj Pannu is a man for whom I have tremendous respect, and he has achieved many things that very few in this House could hope to. How many people can point to starting a second career after

retirement wherein they win a nomination by one vote, they win a seat by 37 votes, they become leader in a landslide, they resign voluntarily as leader more beloved and respected than when they started, and then they ensure that their seat stays with the party that they ran for when they leave politics? To Raj Pannu I say: enjoy your retirement; you deserve it.

I also want to thank the incredible volunteers, over 300 by last count, who contributed to my campaign, and while I can't list them all, I do want to single out two people who worked on my campaign from the moment I decided to run, over two years ago, and without whom I could not have been successful: my husband, Lou Arab, and my good friend Nicole Bownes.

Now, if following in the footsteps of Raj Pannu is not imposing enough, I also have the added responsibility and the extreme honour of being the second Notley to sit in this Legislative Assembly. As such, members will not be surprised if from time to time I refer back to *Hansards* which record positions taken and speeches made by my father.

The first reference to that kind of thing is somewhat of an impromptu observation. There has been a great deal of talk over the last two days about who first advocated for the elimination of health care premiums, and I'd like to take the opportunity of my maiden speech to set the record straight. On Monday, May 9, 1977, the MLA for Spirit River-Fairview and the then leader of the Alberta NDP moved private member's Bill 218, an Act to Repeal the Health Insurance Premiums Act. My hope, members, is that we don't have to wait 38 years for the government to implement other good ideas of ours.

Now, as this is my maiden speech, I also, of course, did refer back to my father's maiden speech for some direction in the task at hand, and in so doing, several other observations warranting mention become apparent. First, I'd like to start by speaking about the issue of democracy in general. In his maiden speech, made in the spring of 1972, my father noted that the first throne speech of the then newly minted PC government sounded eerily similar to the agenda advocated by the just-defeated Social Credit Party. If those observations are to be given any credence, one is left to conclude that this government is not just 37 years old but, rather, is over 70 years old. While this might well be perceived as a conclusion worthy of celebration by the members opposite, I suggest that it does not bode well for the health of our democracy in this province. Given the outcome of the last election, it is not surprising that I have been involved in perhaps more conversations than members opposite about the unfortunate state of democracy in our province.

While it is tempting to simply take your victory where you can get it and move on without questioning it, I believe that the participation rate in our last election is a matter which deserves the serious attention of all members of this House. The voter turnout in the March 2008 election was roughly 20 per cent below the national average in Canada. Another way to look at this is to realize that if they lived in a different province in this country, at least 400,000 more Albertans would have chosen to cast a vote.

In her maiden speech the hon. Attorney General reminded us of the value of our democratic system and the intensity of one's recognition of that value when one is faced with the absence of meaningful democratic rights. I echo those sentiments, but I would go further to say that it is not simply a matter of looking at the experience of Third World countries, countries at war, or countries experiencing civil war and then comparing those to our own. Instead, that is only a start.

There is no doubt that we in Canada have a strong democratic tradition, but I would suggest that it is only ours for as long as we

choose to use it, to respect it, and to rely on it as a means of ensuring that decisions which affect the public sphere are made there. If we abandon or ignore the mechanisms of democracy, if we actively discourage people from relying on them, if we continuously argue that key developments in our community are not eligible for public scrutiny, then one day we will wake up and realize that there is not enough left in the public sphere to warrant the continued engagement of democratically minded citizens.

What do I mean by this, Mr. Speaker? Well, here are some examples. This government believes that economic development should be left to the discretion of the private sector. We are told that this is something with which voters should not bother themselves. As a result, the efficacy, the efficiency, and the consequences of that development, so the story goes, should not be subjected to scrutiny through the lens of public interest. Indeed, just yesterday a minister of this government told the Assembly that the government has no position on the placement of nuclear reactors in our province. He went on to suggest that this critically important topic should be discussed only in some other forum, which may or may not allow for full public engagement, oversight, or accountability. It is my humble opinion that it is approaches like this to critically important questions, like nuclear reactors, that help keep 400,000 Albertans from voting.

I would suggest that good government is, in fact, about good leadership, but good leadership is not reflected in the act of taking the path of least resistance, especially where that path is laid out behind closed doors by a variety of corporate interests. Good leadership is also not about spending millions of taxpayers' dollars to dress up the path of least resistance as something else. Instead, Mr. Speaker, good leadership is about recognizing that the public interest is the government's obligation. Good leadership is about defining the public interest with reference to the quality of life experienced by regular citizens instead of looking only at corporate profit margins. Good leadership is about making hard decisions now for the benefit of future generations. I would venture to say that good leadership equates with what one might describe as activist government.

It is here, Mr. Speaker, that I must resort to quoting directly excerpts of my father's maiden speech. In so doing, I'm sure that members will note some applicability to the circumstances we are dealing with today.

In the spring of 1972 he said in part:

The White Paper . . . outlines the Conservative perspective of government; that government should leave the major initiatives to the private sector, that it should only move when private initiative fails, that it should be passive, not active; that it should react when necessary, not necessarily lead.

He goes on to say:

In my view, passive government is bound to fail despite the sincerity of its advocates . . . As long as that philosophy of government is carried on we will always be dealing with sluggish efforts on housing, but only after housing becomes a critical problem. We will introduce meagre programs in agriculture but only after thousands of farmers have been forced off their land. We will raise token efforts to deal with . . . foreign ownership, but only after the basic resources are almost completely foreign controlled. [Finally,] there will be timid proposals on environmental controls, but again, only after oil spills, strip-mining, and industrial pollution get out of hand . . . Now these, Mr. Speaker, are not indictments of one administration, but rather they measure the failure of a total philosophy of government, a philosophy which confuses fence sitting for leadership.

In reading these words while preparing this speech, Mr. Speaker, I was struck by their prophetic nature. Needless to say, this approach to governance is not one to which I subscribe, and instead I commit

to spending the next four years advocating for an activist government, a government that will always pursue the public interest.

4:00

Mr. Speaker, there are several priority areas of the public interest that I believe require our attention. Our royalty regime is not serving the public interest, and I appreciate that the new Premier initiated a panel to review the regime last fall. However, both the government's panel and the government's final decision fell short. Today Albertans are losing money. Revenue which should be flowing to the owners of the resource is missing from this year's budget, and money for our future slips through our hands and drains south of the border as we speak.

Our environmental regime is not serving the public interest. It sets the course for decades of environmental degradation and guarantees that our children and our grandchildren will have to struggle in crisis with the crisis of climate change.

Our child care programs are not serving the public interest. The government is planning ahead to 2011, at which time they would see themselves providing for approximately half of the spaces required in 2006.

Our postsecondary education system is serving less of the public interest than it once did. With tuition rates among the highest in the country, with Alberta having the lowest university participation rate of any province in the country, with university students receiving no help with the highest housing costs of at least the last four decades, only some of the public can access these institutions.

Our housing strategy is not serving the public interest. The failure to impose rent controls combined with the government's rent assistance program amounts to government-funded gouging in some cases while in others ineligible tenants merely descend further into financial crisis and poverty. Indeed, it amounts to the "sluggish efforts on housing, but only after housing becomes a critical problem" predicted by my father 36 years ago.

Our labour laws are absolutely not serving the public interest. They serve only the interests of large employers at the expense of average working Albertans. Our labour laws have been condemned by the United Nations' International Labour Organization. More recently portions of them have been ruled in breach of our country's Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Our government's refusal to establish balance between employers and their workers along with its refusal to amend our human rights act to reflect a principle of equality long since recognized in every other jurisdiction in the country all are in direct conflict with the public interest.

Finally, in the richest province in the country, we still see the greatest disparity between rich and poor and rates of income support which are well below recognized measures of the poverty line. A measure of a community's strength is not how well it punishes those unable to care for themselves. Governments simply must do much more and much better to eliminate poverty from our midst.

All of these issues must be addressed, Mr. Speaker, if government is to adopt an activist stance focused on meeting its obligation to the public. Moreover, they must be addressed if government is to restore a faith or, in fact, even an interest in the democratic system in Alberta because it is this interest and this faith in the democratic system upon which the strength, the effectiveness, and the relevance of this Assembly rely. As Members of this Legislative Assembly we must never forget that.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to address the Assembly.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for questions or comments for the hon. member.

There being none, then the hon. member may sit, if she chooses to, unless she wants to make another comment.

**Ms Notley:** I'd like to make a motion to adjourn debate on the throne speech.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

**The Speaker:** I'm going to make a little comment, though, to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. I did that little exercise a minute ago. There's something unique about this place. I've had the privilege of serving in this Assembly with the hon. member's father, and he was a very distinguished representative of the people, but that's two generations. I've also had the privilege of serving in this Assembly, replacing the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert's father, who was my mentor. So there have been two Notleys, two Horners. Also the hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills: I served with his father and him. That's two Webbers. Then we have the situation with the former hon. Member for Cardston, Mr. Ady. His daughter-in-law is now with us in this Assembly. I'm not sure what any of this means; however, it's a great form of wisdom that I've had and a lot of bonding with a lot of different people.

**An Hon. Member:** What about the Johnsons?

**The Speaker:** Of course. The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose, and now the hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater. That's five sets. That makes me feel really good, by the way.

## Government Motions

### Provincial Fiscal Policies

*(continued)*

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, I do believe.

**Mr. Mason:** Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and speak to this motion and to respond to the hon. minister's first budget. The purpose of a budget is to plan and to account for monetary decisions in an open and approved way. But I want to start by saying that I think the entire budget is based on one key assumption which is false. It's based on the projection that oil will be worth \$78 per barrel over the next year. I've read a lot of reports, spoken to a lot of people about the likelihood, and I don't accept that this is a reasonable figure.

In our leaders' debate the Premier commented on how effective I was at predicting the past. In this case I'm finding it pretty easy to predict the future. The unrealistic, lowball estimate that the government is using to determine the price of oil and, in turn, return of energy revenue equates to approximately five and a half billion dollars in the first year. By the second it should be about \$11 billion, and even more from that point on. Now, this isn't looking at the highest projections of oil prices. It's looking at \$110 a barrel oil, or \$8 less than it closed yesterday, \$10 less than Jeff Rubin with the CIBC World Markets, and \$15 less than Suncor is projecting for 2008. By completely ignoring what's happening in the energy sector in terms of pricing, this government is failing to account for billions of dollars. These billions should be worked into the budget in a plan for our future.

We need this government to look down the road and set goals: to set goals for Alberta's economy, make a strong plan for the future of our environment and to support families. By having an \$11 billion

surplus, this government can dole out \$2.75 billion on maintenance without going through the Legislature and another \$2.75 billion on various capital projects and another \$5.5 billion to save how they choose.

I wish I could call this new creative math, but it's not. The government has been doing this for years. Over the past five years this government has underestimated the surpluses by more than \$30 billion. During that same period government estimates for the price of oil were 23 to 46 per cent below the rates today. First, by failing to demand full value for our royalties and, second, by failing to project those revenues given a realistic value of the commodity, this government is failing to set out any realistic long-term plan.

I'd be remiss if I didn't acknowledge the fact that the headline of the budget news release focuses on an initiative that the NDP has been calling for for years and just identified by my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, and that is the NDP private member's bill calling for the elimination of health care premiums. It was in 1977 that our first NDP MLA, Grant Notley, proposed this bill calling for the elimination of health care premiums.

4:10

Mr. Speaker, I want to deal with some areas of concern with respect to spending in this budget. Particularly, I would like to start with the environment, and this is a quote. I've left out his name, which was in the quote, in deference to the rules of the House. "Premier [Blank's] government doesn't seem to understand that the environment is a priority for Albertans, and that Albertans' priorities need to be reflected in the budget." That's from the Pembina Institute. Royalty revenues should be used to save for the future and to create a sustainable economy: green collar jobs such as those which we have proposed in our green energy plan.

Mr. Speaker, there's a lack of funding for environmental protection. SRD funding has been cut by 27 per cent. Long-term effects of oil sands development must be addressed when this takes place. There's really not a significant item in the budget dealing with climate change. We should be investing in energy efficiency and supporting renewable energy initiatives, not a few million dollars but as a major priority for this province and funded appropriately.

What little money has been included in this budget has been marked for the focus on carbon capture and storage. Now, Mr. Speaker, perhaps carbon capture and storage is a partial solution to the problems that we face in terms of CO<sub>2</sub> production in this province. We have a particular responsibility, I believe, in this province because we produce so much of it, but also, because the revenue stream to the provincial government is so great, we have the capacity to deal with it. But I believe that carbon capture is not the responsibility of the Alberta taxpayer. It is the responsibility of the people who are releasing the CO<sub>2</sub>, and most CO<sub>2</sub> is released by industry and not by individuals. So I say to the government: if you want coal-fired power plants, if you want increased development in the tar sands and you want to use carbon capture as a way of offsetting the effects on climate by those industries, then this must be paid for by the industries themselves. Having said that, Mr. Speaker, I believe that this is a technology that is not proven. It's not proven in Alberta, and it can only be a temporary solution to the problems that we must eventually grapple with.

Mr. Speaker, we need to look forward and to establish a green economy using the value from our oil and gas to accomplish this. Other jurisdictions have done a great deal more to take advantage of their energy windfall than Alberta has. Norway has established a fund that now has reached \$365 billion. We need to do long-term financial planning of that nature in this province, and I believe the reason the government lowballs energy costs in their budget

estimates is so that they can hide these big surpluses, which they call unanticipated. These surpluses are unanticipated by the government only. Everybody else can see them coming. You just have to do a little bit of arithmetic. It would be better if that money was in the budget and we could establish some long-term financial planning for this province. I'm talking about a timeline of 10 years or 20 years. Other jurisdictions are diversifying their economy, and we should as well. Germany and even Texas have better groundings in terms of renewable forms of energy.

With respect to community supports, my hon. colleague today asked the ministers a very good question: could they survive on the amount that they expect AISH recipients to survive on? Now, the ministers didn't answer that question, but I'll answer it for them. They could not.

Mr. Speaker, I do want to indicate that with respect to health, we appreciate the fact that there is some priority placed on this department in this budget. There is a 9.1 per cent increase. There is a need to keep this money focused on the public and to protect public health care. Mr. Knight from AUPE has said:

It's a great thing to build new hospitals, but hospitals require people to run them, and those people must be paid wages sufficient to keep them in the challenging health care environment at a time when there are many other economic alternatives in Alberta.

This is the fundamental problem that we have in this province. We can build hospitals. We can encourage the construction of child care centres. We can build long-term care facilities for our senior citizens. We can talk about increasing the size of police forces. But the recruitment and retention of people in these fields is a challenge that we must address in this province.

I've thought about this in many respects, and I cannot find a way to satisfactorily solve this problem as long as the government maintains its position that it will not touch the brake on tar sands development. This is the clear policy position enunciated by the Premier on his first day as the new leader of the Conservative Party. I think this is perhaps the most problematic issue facing our province. We need to have a pace of development which is sustainable and allows us to catch up with infrastructure and with employment in many areas, which gives full employment to Albertans but does not turn the tar sands and the alternative petroleum resources in this province over to development by people from outside this country.

Mr. Speaker, I want to deal a little bit with housing. It's a good thing that homelessness, shelter support, and transitional housing are identified in the budget, but the government has rejected protecting tenants from gouging by landlords, preferring instead to provide a fund that goes into the pocket on the right side of the tenant, then comes out of that pocket and gets paid to the landlord, effectively subsidizing high rents by landlords in this province with taxpayers' money. We don't believe that this is the right way to go. We are now spending \$58 million on this program, which will end up in the pockets of wealthy landlords.

Mr. Speaker, we do not believe that private schools should be supported with public funds. We are strong proponents of public education. We respect the rights of people who want to establish alternate forms of education for their children, but we don't believe that that should be subsidized by the general taxpayers.

We've been talking for the last five years or more about the need to bring the number of police officers up to the national average in this province. In the 2004 election it was 500 police officers. In the recent election we recalculated that it was 800. The police chiefs of this province are crying out for more police officers, but they are faced with the same problem: how can they attract and retain enough people given the economic situation in this province? The proposal

in the budget to hire a hundred new police officers is inadequate, but at least it's a step in the right direction. In the past the government has funded a handful of police officers, but they were for rural areas, to support RCMP. It's important, I think, that the big cities get some attention with respect to this as well.

Mr. Speaker, in the area of child care I think there's some funny math. The government underspent their budget this year by \$13 million, and when they increase the budget to \$196 million, they call it a \$76 million increase when it's really a \$62 million increase over what's budgeted. You know, that might be quibbling, but it's still a lot of millions of dollars. The funding is necessary. It's appreciated. But I do not believe that we will be solving the child care problem in the proposal that the government has because it doesn't deal with the affordability issue. We think it's going to be very possible in Alberta, if we spend as much on child care as the national average, that we can provide child care at \$25 a day. That's about half of what many parents are paying today. We need to make child care more affordable.

4:20

The other piece of that, Mr. Speaker, which I don't think the government's proposal deals with, is making sure that child care workers are adequately paid. The care of our children should be of fundamental importance to us. The people that we pay to take care of our children should be valued more than people who work at fast-food outlets, but so far they're not, and I don't believe that the government's proposal will fix that.

Mr. Speaker, I want to just conclude by saying that as budgets go, I've seen worse budgets in this place. There is some progress in a number of areas, and I want to give the government credit for that and at the same time take a little credit ourselves because these are issues that we have been raising and fighting for for many years, from policing to the elimination of health care premiums and many other things in between.

Mr. Speaker, we have a wonderful opportunity in this province. We have an unparalleled opportunity because of the tremendous wealth that we could have from our tar sands, and we should take advantage of it.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood being the third member to participate, it means that the option for Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available, so if anybody would like to participate, they may now proceed in that regard.

It's to the question-and-answer portion, Government House Leader?

**Mr. Hancock:** Yes, Mr. Speaker. I'm wondering if the hon. member, having given a somewhat rambling but otherwise often interesting debate, would like to move adjournment.

**Mr. Mason:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In response to the hon. Government House Leader, if there are no other questions for me, I would be pleased to do that. Before I do, I just want to say that we do have a wonderful opportunity in this province, but we can do a better job in terms of long-term financial planning. We should be building up savings in this province. We should be investing in a green energy fund that will allow us to transition our economy from one based on petroleum energy and coal energy towards renewable energy. That's a vision that I think we could all work towards. There's going to come a time when it is no longer possible to sell our oil because of its impact on climate change.



With that, Mr. Speaker, I will move that we adjourn debate on this item.

**The Speaker:** I won't call that question because other members have indicated their desire to participate under Standing Order 29(2)(a). I will call the question at the time frame.

**Mr. Allred:** Mr. Speaker, my apologies for not understanding the rules very well here. I'd like to just make a few comments, particularly with reference to the comments of the Leader of her Majesty's Official Opposition.

**The Speaker:** Well, at this point in time it should be directed to the comments made by the leader of the third party.

**Mr. Allred:** Okay. Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Any comments or questions with respect to the comments made by the leader of the third party?

There being none, then the motion put forward by the hon. member to adjourn this section of debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

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

[Adjourned debate April 23: Ms Notley]

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

**Dr. Sherman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you two guests that I have joining me on this special day, Courtney Day and Geoff Squires. If we can give them a round of applause. It's a wonderful honour and privilege for me to be able to rise today and speak in this Assembly for the first time. In this hallowed Chamber I had taken a vow of silence until the commencement of my maiden speech. My silence is now broken.

This Chamber lost one Raj and one medical doctor. I felt compelled to fill both of those spots with one MLA.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to congratulate you on your election as Speaker and the Deputy Speaker, and I look forward to your guidance over this House of democracy. I would also like to congratulate all of the MLAs in this House and all of my colleagues with whom I have an opportunity to serve this wonderful province. I wish to express my deepest gratitude to the good people of Edmonton-Meadowlark for giving me the humbling opportunity of serving them.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

I must say that my presence in this House of democracy is rather unlikely. In introducing myself to this Assembly, I would like to share with you stories of my family. I'm a first-, second-, and third-generation Canadian and father to a fourth generation. In 1906 my grandfather, when he was 16 years old, jumped on a ship and went to seek adventure in a new country. He ended up on the west coast of Canada. He worked hard in the lumber industry, and he did well. He was an entrepreneur. There came a time in the '40s when he felt compelled to go back to his homeland in search of bringing democracy and freedom to India. He was one of the respected members

who were an integral part of the process to bring the democratic movement to India, the biggest functioning democracy on the planet.

My mother's family were refugees in their own country after the partition. They sought refuge in the desert, in a village in Bikaner, Rajasthan, across the border from Pakistan. I was born in that village. My respective grandparents had big dreams for their son and daughter and the country in which their children were born. Our country realized its dream, and it is a major partner and role model for democratic change in this modern-day society.

I'd like to talk about my father. My father, like his father before him, came to Canada but at a much later date, in 1965. He worked as a labourer in the lumber mills his father had built. He started fresh, with a hundred dollars in his pocket. My mother was a single mother for seven years. My father left India when I was two years old. She raised three boys. We were raised by her family in that village, and then we were raised on my grandfather's farm.

In 1975, at the age of seven, I came to Canada and learned English. English is my third language. I was given an opportunity to come to the best country in the world to live to my potential. Over the years I had the opportunity to excel in sports, to live to my potential and become an emergency doctor. I've had the privilege of serving as a flight physician in Alberta and representing my colleagues at the Alberta Medical Association. I've been an advocate for patients, for those who don't have a voice. I've had the privilege of being an educator, the privilege of coaching my children and their friends, and of being a parent.

The blood that courses in my veins is blood that believes in personal sacrifice for the sake of democracy, freedom of speech, and the betterment of society and the world in which we live. I was fortunate in my life to have had great parents, a good family, role models who have given me wise guidance. I've had the opportunity to do many things in my short life. I've had a life that a child in a village in a far-off land lives only in a dream. My parents shared a common vision to pass on to their four sons: the values of hard work, a good education, decency, honesty, a sense of purpose, and the value above all values for their children to have a sense of personal responsibility for themselves, their family, and others around them, a value that is a core essence of the spirit of Alberta, a value that unites us all in this Chamber.

**4:30**

Mr. Speaker, when I stand here today and look back on that, it's clear to me that what made all the difference in my life was the opportunity to get an education. My education was my way to honour the sacrifices of my parents and my forefathers. I owe a great debt to all those who have come before me, and in no other country is this story so easy to write as in Canada and in no other province as in Alberta. I stand here today grateful, realizing that the dreams of my grandparents live on in my daughter and in my son, both of whom were born in this great city and province. My family's story is the story of many Albertans, many families who have ventured here in search of a better future for themselves.

Mr. Speaker, please allow me to tell you a story about my constituents in Edmonton-Meadowlark. This is a constituency with a diverse ethnic and socioeconomic background. It's home to many schools and many seniors' facilities, like the Westend Seniors Activity Centre. It's home to West Edmonton Mall, the tourist mecca of Edmonton and a centre of entrepreneurship, where a family from far-off lands lives beyond the dreams of what they thought was possible. It's home to care providers. It's home to a hospital that cares for people who are sick when they have no one else to look after them.

Many good people have represented the good people of Edmonton-Meadowlark in the past: a former Speaker of the House, the hon. Gerry Amerongen; hon. members Grant Mitchell, Karen Liebovici, Bob Maskell, and Maurice Tougas. I am happy and humbled to follow in their footsteps. During the campaign experience I came across three other constituents who have walked through these halls: Premier Don Getty, hon. Mary LeMessurier, and David Coutts.

I'd like to bring up a quote from Martin Luther King Jr.: "Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter." I'd like to repeat that. "Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter." That's why we're here. We are here because there are many important things that matter to the people that we represent. As a public servant, Mr. Speaker, the things that matter most to me are the things that matter to my constituents. In speaking about the issues for the people of Edmonton-Meadowlark, I will talk about them.

On a cold day, when it was 36 below, we needed shelter, and a kind woman by the name of Lisa was kind enough to invite us in. She had four beautiful children running around the house rambunctiously, a baby crying in the background. As we got talking, we discovered she was a single mother. She was a widow, raising her children by herself, and she had a full-time job. The baby she was babysitting was her neighbour's child, who was also a single mother who was working to try to feed her family of five. Mr. Speaker, Lisa is doing what she needs to do to be responsible. Her children are our future. Their future is our future, and their education is our responsibility. Societies that outeducate us today will outperform us tomorrow, and I believe education has been the core foundation of what our society is today.

I'd like to tell you about Mrs. Melnyk. I knocked on her door on another cold day, and I left. Two minutes later the door slowly opened, and I ran back. Mrs. Melnyk was in her late 80s. She lived alone. It took her a long time to walk to the door. The great experience I had was making house calls in a way. I put my politician hat on, and I asked Mrs. Melnyk when her hip operation was going to be done. It wasn't. She hadn't even bothered to complain or even ask her doctor for advice. She didn't want to be a burden. I gave Mrs. Melnyk my personal phone number, and I said: if you have any difficulties, you call me. Her physician assessed her. Within three months she was put on the list to have her hip fixed. Mrs. Melnyk is a volunteer who looks after other seniors. I was absolutely amazed by the spirit of this woman.

I'd like to tell you about Walter. Walter wouldn't even look at me in the driveway. Walter had had two break-and-enters at his home. He had been assaulted. He was an Edmonton bus driver, and he refused to return to work. Safety was a big issue for Walter, and he was not even going to vote. I reassured Walter that there were two police officers in the blocks next to his. I gave him my cell number as well, and I said: "On the off chance we're unable to protect you, you phone me. My job is to be your servant. I'm available to you 24 hours a day."

Then I ran into many new Albertans from other countries and from other provinces. These were the happiest Albertans. They had jobs. They had what everybody else wants in this world and this country: good-paying jobs. With those they bought homes. They can feed their families and feed their children and educate their children.

Mr. Speaker, in order to represent the people of Edmonton-Meadowlark, our team listened. We listened for nine months on warm days, on cold days, on wet days, on snowy days, on beautiful days, and on Alberta's birthday, which also happens to be my

birthday. The people that I met at the doors know that they have to work hard to get ahead, and they want to work hard. Parents have to parent. Children have to learn. They cannot achieve unless we guide them to raise their expectation of themselves.

Albertans must live healthier lives. People don't expect government to solve all of their problems, but they do have a deep-rooted desire for leadership from their elected officials to create the circumstances so that those who are capable of working work, so those who are capable of learning learn, so those who are in need of medical care get the care that they deserve in a timely fashion, and so that Albertans can live their lives to the fullest potential and enjoy the fruits of this province.

On March 3 Albertans were given a choice, to choose a leader to take Alberta to greater heights, a leader who embodies the qualities that Albertans value – honesty, decency, responsibility, and hard work – not somebody who is afraid of making tough decisions, good decisions. The good people of Alberta have given the Premier and this government a clear mandate to take action on broadening Alberta's economy; to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of our health care system; to meet the growing needs of the public infrastructure; to responsibly develop Alberta's energy resources; to ensure that the most vital component of our growing province, our communities, become strong, safe, and free for our families; but, most importantly, to take this province of Alberta, this great province, to greater heights than we've ever seen before, to be an example of hope and prosperity for this country and for the world, to allow individuals to realize their dreams, and to encourage other 16-year-olds in search of adventure and a new life, like my grandfather.

Mr. Speaker, I'm encouraged by the words in the Speech from the Throne. I look forward to working with all of my colleagues in the Legislature on all sides, to bringing these words to fruition, to allowing ideas and free thought to prosper, and to respectfully debating and improving ideas.

I'm thankful to the people of Edmonton-Meadowlark for granting me the privilege of serving as their representative in this honoured Chamber. My thanks also to Premier Stelmach and to the many members in the government caucus who encouraged our team and worked to help me get to this great place of honour. You are only as good as the people you surround yourself with. In this hall I am surrounded by a fantastic group of people.

A special thanks to my campaign team, who made this possible, a campaign team that was absolutely superb, and without their undying devotion to volunteerism and an undying belief in ideas and solutions my presence here would not be possible. Thanks to my family, to my mother for sewing clothes so I could educate myself, to my father for being an adventurer like his father and working hard to give me the education that I have today, and to my children and extended family for supporting me in this adventure. I am humbled to have the opportunity to immortalize the memories and sacrifices of my maternal grandparents, Devraj and Shakuntala Devi Pathak, as well as my paternal grandparents, Bal Mukand and Parsini Devi, in Alberta's written record.

Mr. Speaker, I now take my vow to exercise my duty to speak up for things that matter as my new life begins. Thank you for the honour of speaking to you today on behalf of my constituents and my province. May God bless you, and may God bless this wonderful province.

Thank you.

4:40

**The Deputy Speaker:** Well, following the member's 15-minute speech, there are five minutes for questions and comments according to Standing Order 29(2)(a).

Seeing none, then I would like to recognize the hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

**Mr. Johnson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Boy, it's going to be tough to follow my colleagues here after such heartfelt speeches. But I also want to say that in my journey to this Assembly I'm grateful and fortunate to have been supported by many experienced MLAs, including someone who's been a great mentor and opened my eyes to the possibility of serving Alberta in this capacity, my father, LeRoy Johnson, but also past constituency MLAs Frank Appleby, Keith Everitt, Dave Broda, Steve Zarusky, and, of course, our constituency's most recent MLA, a man who worked very hard in this building and beyond for the last two decades, Mike Cardinal.

I'm humbled and honoured to be able to address the Assembly today in my maiden speech. While it's an honour to be able to address the Assembly and an honour to be in the Chamber of this historic building, the greatest honour is knowing that I was sent here by thousands of Albertans living in the constituency of Athabasca-Redwater who have placed their trust in me, Albertans who want our province to remain the best place in the world to live, work, and raise a family. In Alberta we need to continue to be innovative, seizing and capitalizing on our many opportunities but realizing that with those opportunities comes the responsibility to ensure that we are not saddling our children or our grandchildren with liabilities and debts through our actions or inactions.

The great constituency of Athabasca-Redwater epitomizes Alberta's character past and present, its challenges, and its potential. It echoes the message from the throne that we need action for today and tomorrow. From Calling Lake and Wandering River in the north to Edmonton Garrison in the south, from Sturgeon Valley in the west to Smoky Lake in the east my constituency is as large as it is diverse. I'm privileged to serve 13 municipalities, eight summer villages, one First Nation reserve, 27 schools from five different school divisions, four hospitals from two separate health regions, over a dozen seniors' lodges and long-term care facilities, one major university, a military base, and everybody in between.

I'm not originally from this constituency – I was born and raised in Camrose – but on the first day of my first trip to the Athabasca region I decided to buy a house and stay. The region is full of natural beauty, rich in culture, history, and opportunity. With northern resource activity, forestry, agriculture, a beautiful new multiplex, one of Alberta's best golf courses, the northern Alberta Fringe, and Magnificent River Rats Festival, the Athabasca region has much to offer.

Some in this Assembly may not know that in the late 1800s and early 1900s Athabasca was a hub of activity. Located at the elbow of the Athabasca River, one of the highways of the day, it was a critical piece of the Hudson Bay transportation network in the Northwest Territories. Riverboats and scows were built here to take goods and people up and down the Athabasca, and through some of that time it was an important staging ground for the Klondike gold rush. In the 1890s Athabasca Landing was the gateway to the north, and of special interest was a group of Oklahoma Blacks who put down roots to farm in Amber Valley in the early 1900s, escaping prejudice and seeking freedom.

Mr. Speaker, as with our forefathers, that innovation, pioneering spirit, and forward thinking is alive and well today with one of our constituency's largest employers. It's a seed planted by past Alberta governments who 23 years ago relocated a small correspondence school to a rural area. Alberta is just now realizing that we have one of the foremost distance learning institutions in the entire world: Athabasca University, affectionately known as AU. In the digital age, one of electronic training and teaching, an age where we need

our population in the workforce but still learning, an age where we need education to be affordable and accessible to all, the significance of this university for our province cannot be overstated.

At AU a remarkable 74 per cent of graduates are the first in their family to earn a university degree. Sixty-seven per cent of students are women. AU created the world's first online MBA program, which is Canada's largest, and is the only Canadian university accredited in the United States. With a student population of over 37,000 they touch more students than any other university in Alberta, and they have no classrooms. It is through innovative elements like AU that we can leverage our investment in Alberta's SuperNet and provide opportunity for work, education, and research in rural areas and increase capacity for many of our postsecondary programs. I'm very happy that through the leadership of the minister of advanced education our government is recognizing the impact and potential of Athabasca University.

I want to commend another of our area's innovative and largest employers. Between Grassland, the village of Boyle, and Athabasca lies Alberta-Pacific Forest Industries, Al-Pac for short. This pulp mill is one of the largest single-line pulp mills in the world and one of the most efficient, but more importantly it boasts a very strong social and environmental conscience. It's a carbon neutral facility, and its carbon emissions are now lower than they were in 1994. It has the potential to add a significant amount of green power back into our grid, enough to power the city of St. Albert, I'm told. I was pleased that our government ordered research grants to Al-Pac that will help them explore the viability of their biofuels projects. These are good investments for today and tomorrow.

Boyle and Athabasca also have another interesting commonality. Surprisingly, these two communities, totalling only 3,500 residents, have produced two current national television sports broadcasters for TSN: Boyle's Brian Mudryk and Athabasca's Jay Onrait. We're very proud of them both.

To the far north in Calling Lake we have a beautiful setting: white sandy beaches, summer cabins, year-round residents living alongside a First Nations reserve, a community faced with challenges with little opportunity for employment, low education, social problems, and high crime rates. The problems faced in this First Nations community are not unique in Alberta. I welcome the throne speech's statement that we need to increase this group's participation in the workforce. We need to continue to look for ways to nurture success in this growing segment of our population.

Mr. Speaker, just as we were over a century ago, our constituency is still the gateway to the north today. Two-thirds of the Fort McMurray corridor lies within my constituency. Highway 63 travels through our constituency past Thorhild, Newbrook, Abee, Boyle, Grassland, and Wandering River. It's another great example of Alberta's opportunity and its responsibility. It's the road to prosperity for many, yet safety on this stretch of highway is of paramount concern to my constituents and the many Albertans who commute on it weekly.

The accidents that we see here, some of them involving very large equipment and hazardous materials, have become too common. They are also creating a real challenge for the volunteer firefighters from our small rural towns. Limited in numbers, these emergency responders seldom use their firefighter training. They're most often first on the scene, last to leave, and they clean up some very grisly accidents. We need to look for ways that we can better support these emergency crews, and our efforts to beef up the infrastructure and policing on this corridor need to be expedited. Thankfully, the throne speech confirms that the government recognized these challenges with regard to twinning highway 63, additional police in Alberta, safe communities, and emergency preparedness.

In the areas around Thorhild, Smoky Lake, Waskatenau, Warspite, and Radway we have rural Alberta at its best: great people who care deeply about their neighbours and their province. I encourage all Albertans to check out the Iron Horse Trail or come see an 1,100-pound pumpkin at the famous Smoky Lake Pumpkin Festival. In these areas it's common to see residents who are fourth- or fifth-generation Albertans who have worked very hard on the same land their forefathers homesteaded a century ago. However, the livestock producers in these areas are struggling. Fortunately, Alberta has great leadership in a Premier, minister of agriculture, and several caucus members who are experienced livestock producers. The throne speech's commitment to work with this industry as they create their own vision for sustainability will be critical for many of my constituents.

4:50

In the southern part of my constituency lie Redwater, Gibbons, Bon Accord, Namao, and Sturgeon Valley. In this area large existing plants – Agrium, Degussa, and Provident, just to name a few – will be joined by proposed industry, including value-added upgraders. This area holds vast potential for carbon capture and storage while enhancing production at the Redwater oil field. Currently ARC Resources is investing in pilots, and I commend their initiative and hope that we can incent innovative projects like this. The Industrial Heartland embodies the duality of opportunity and responsibility in Alberta today, as mentioned in the throne speech. We need to continue to nurture private-sector development while collaboratively anticipating the strains it will create on infrastructure and the environmental cumulative effects for the entire region.

Mr. Speaker, I've saved the best for last. It's a real honour to have Edmonton Garrison in my constituency. Thousands of troops are based here. Alberta and Canada are richer because of them. I am constantly mindful of the sacrifice they and their families are making. As an Assembly we do not debate the missions they go on, but we can and should look for ways that this province can recognize and support them and their families. They not only contribute to Alberta as regular residents but in extraordinary ways for us all.

My constituency is indeed large and diverse, rich in nature, culture, and history. But like Alberta our greatest resource is not our oil, it's not our cattle, and it's not our industry. It's our people. It is the people of Athabasca-Redwater that have sent me here to help capitalize on opportunities and ensure that we are responsible to the next generation. As the throne speech declared to take action for today and tomorrow for a strong and stable Alberta, I am privileged to be part of a team that is not afraid of tough decisions, with a leader with integrity and a diverse caucus full of talent and experience. I'm here to work hard for all Albertans and to help ensure that we leave Alberta even better than we found it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Well, again, there is five minutes for questions and comments, according to Standing Order 29(2)(a).

Seeing none, then I would like to recognize the hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

**Mr. Dallas:** Mr. Speaker, I'm honoured and humbled to rise and address this First Session of the 27th Legislature with my maiden speech. I wish to offer my congratulations on your election as Deputy Speaker and to the Speaker of the House. This is a sentiment that is shared by the residents of Red Deer-South. Red Deer-South has high expectations for their new MLA, and they understand the importance of effective leadership in the operation of this Assembly to allow all MLAs to achieve effective representation.

Your respect for the traditions of the parliamentary process, your sincerity, your honesty and humility will add greatly to the success of this 27th Legislature.

Mr. Speaker, I am a fourth-generation Albertan. My great-grandfather Thomas Dallas arrived in Innisfail during Alberta's first years. Thomas and his wife, Mary Ann, had four children, the oldest being six years of age when Thomas died in 1916. Mary Ann, Minnie Dallas, raised four children, owned and operated a restaurant and later a boardinghouse. This was no small feat for a diminutive woman in the early 1900s, only to be repeated by my grandmother Pearl Dallas after my grandfather Ken passed away at a young age, leaving three Dallas children to raise on her own in the '40s. Each successive Dallas generation has made a humble contribution to life in Alberta, a contribution punctuated by hard work, respect for family and neighbours, and a love of our community and province.

Mr. Speaker, I'm mindful that I stand here today not only as a result of the support of my immediate family and constituents but a product of the determination and the hard work the Dallas women I have described brought to this great province. Rest assured I will be mindful of this fact as I conduct myself over the balance of this legislative session.

While our pioneers may have completed the heavy lifting for us, there are significant challenges and opportunities for Albertans today. The Speech from the Throne delivered by His Honour on April 15 captures the agenda that Albertans and the citizens of Red Deer-South expressed to us during the recent election.

Mr. Speaker, broadening our economy is an action our Premier has identified as crucial to our future. Red Deer is poised to provide leadership through a variety of initiatives already under way that will be complemented by this government's commitment to economic diversification. Our economic transition will be facilitated through a community commitment to lifelong learning. From early childhood programming, our school system, and our pride and joy, Red Deer College, we seek to make education accessible to all. Our future depends upon our ability to attract, to train, and to retain both a skilled workforce and, just as importantly, the entrepreneurs who will create the new jobs in Red Deer. The exciting expansion of the trades programs as well as new training opportunities for health professionals at Red Deer College will help us meet the needs of central Alberta. The new enterprise fund will aid central Alberta entrepreneurs to attract venture capital and bridge the gap between emergent technology and commercialization.

Breaking down barriers to trade is critical to developing our economy in Red Deer. The implementation of the B.C.-Alberta trade, investment, and labour mobility agreement will help Red Deer's economic growth. Successful implementation will lead to agreements across Canada, providing economic benefits to all Canadians. Realizing our potential through partnerships is a Red Deer trademark. Our economic development commitments with the Central Alberta Economic Partnership and the Red Deer RED, Regional Economic Development, which is a unique venture between the city, Red Deer county, the chamber of commerce, and Red Deer College, draws on the strengths of each entity to deliver effective investment, attraction, and retention work. Recent dialogue and planning for the redevelopment of our river lands promises to enhance the quality of life in Red Deer and has the potential to create a unique tourist destination to the benefit of all Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, as I address the opportunities for strengthening our economic base, I'd be remiss if I did not include agriculture. Traditionally agriculture has been an important component of our local economy. The future looks bright with the emergence of technology developments in the areas of utilizing cereals and oilseeds to generate fuels and other energy products. However, we

must also address the impacts that the sudden changes to grain prices are having on our meat industry.

During the recent election campaign I visited with thousands of families on their doorsteps. Enhancing the efficiency and accessibility of our health care system is a priority for the citizens of Red Deer-South. The time is right to review and renew our governance model, to invest in capacity, and focus on providing our health professionals with the latitude and resources to deliver services that work for all Albertans. Eliminating health care premiums by January 2009 will benefit many Red Deer families and, particularly, support our young workforce.

Mr. Speaker, the environment is critical to our sustainability in Red Deer. Residents look to our government to provide leadership in supporting the development of environment-friendly technologies while being careful stewards of our air, our land, and our water. The protection of our Red Deer River subbasin is essential to the future of Red Deer. As we work together enhancing the quality of life in Red Deer, residents recognize that our rapid growth presents a variety of social challenges.

5:00

Red Deer is a welcoming community. Whether you are immigrating to Canada, moving to Red Deer from another province, or perhaps have joined us through the temporary foreign worker program, new citizens will see evidence of our work, which has been supported by our government, and our understanding of the challenges, including language barriers, that new residents face. Our citizens expect us to help reduce crime, and this government's commitment to further invest in policing will support our local initiatives to enhance safety and security in Red Deer.

Mr. Speaker, Red Deer's population is growing very rapidly. Indeed, we are Alberta's third-largest city. Our infrastructure must also support a large number of Albertans who live in the thriving communities close by. Many of these folks commute into Red Deer daily for work, for recreation, or to access a variety of support services. Our municipal government and our neighbour Red Deer county have co-operated in the development of land-use planning that will serve Red Deer well over the next 50 years.

Affordable housing continues to be a challenge in Red Deer. Our government is committed to support initiatives for the homeless, seniors, and persons with disabilities. During the election campaign I was invited into many homes where families are grappling with the challenges of caring for loved ones that are in need of a hand up. The development of more affordable supportive living spaces is a priority in Red Deer.

Mr. Speaker, the most heartwarming visits I had during February were with two distinct groups of citizens. During visits to schools, on the street, and in their homes I was continually awed by our youth. Red Deer is very fortunate to have evolved a wide variety of opportunities to mentor, encourage, and to support our educators in the development of our most precious resource.

Our seniors were a constant source of amazement, and I marvel at their humility, perseverance, resiliency, and positive outlook on life in Alberta. That said, I met seniors on fixed or very limited incomes that are faced with the challenge of maintaining the quality of life we expect for the people who built this province. I'm confident that this Assembly will be mindful of the needs of our seniors, and we will meet the challenges now and in the future.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, I would like to thank the citizens of Red Deer-South for the confidence they have expressed in our Premier, our party, and myself. I am committed to being accessible, to listening carefully, and to working diligently on their behalf.

Thank you.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Again, we have five minutes for questions and comments according to Standing Order 29(2)(a).

Seeing none, now I would like to recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

**Mr. Horne:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As a new member of this Assembly it's a distinct privilege to rise today and speak on behalf of my constituency of Edmonton-Rutherford. I join my colleagues in thanking His Honour the Lieutenant Governor for the Speech from the Throne.

I'd like to congratulate the hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock on his election as Speaker of this Assembly and to thank him on behalf of all of us for his devoted service to Alberta and his continuing leadership, guidance, and support to all of us as members. Acknowledgement and congratulations are also due to you, Mr. Speaker, as the Member for Calgary-Fort, for your election as Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees and to the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat on his election as Deputy Chair of Committees.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to congratulate all members of the Assembly on their respective elections or re-elections as the case may be. Many of you have been mentors to me over the past few years and played a significant role in my decision to seek office in the past election. I'm especially proud to serve alongside the 33 members of the Assembly who are serving for the first time. The First Session of the 27th Legislature commences at one of the most exciting times and one of the most critical junctures in Alberta's history.

Most importantly, Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the constituents of Edmonton-Rutherford for allowing me the tremendous privilege of representing them in this Assembly, and on their behalf I extend sincere appreciation to my predecessors who served the constituency since its establishment in 1993: the late Percy Wickman, Mr. Ian McClelland, and Mr. Rick Miller.

Mr. Speaker, many of my colleagues have spoken much more eloquently than I could and with tremendous passion about the formative experiences and beliefs that led to their decision to enter public life. Like everyone here I've been moved by some of the stories we've heard; a recent example, the story from the Member for Edmonton-McClung. My personal history cannot lay claim to the tremendous struggle nor the joy and exhilaration associated with coming to Canada and having the good fortune to land in Alberta.

I grew up in a small town in Ontario named Whitby – at that time it had about 10,000 residents – located on the shore of Lake Ontario and just east of Toronto.

**Mr. Lukaszuk:** That's just as good.

**Mr. Horne:** That's just as good.

Like several of my colleagues my wife, Jennifer, and I are Albertans by choice. We first came to Edmonton in 1992. I spent the majority of my professional career working in public policy, specifically in the area of health and health care, but, Mr. Speaker, there's no doubt that it was my lifelong interest in debate and speech activities that was a major factor that led me to the decision to seek the opportunity to stand here today as a member of the Assembly.

That began as a high school student, when I had the opportunity to debate competitively, and later in my career, where as an avocation I had the privilege of coaching many national and international debaters. In fact, it was the acceptance of a position as executive director of the Alberta Debate and Speech Association that brought me to Alberta in 1992. I remember that August day very well, Mr. Speaker, for the weather was very much like what we experienced in the last couple of days here in Edmonton.

Indeed, Mr. Speaker, my first visit to this very Chamber and its precincts was in 1992, when I was charged with the responsibility of organizing the model Legislature, which has and continues to be generously hosted by this Assembly with the great co-operation of the Speaker and the Legislative Assembly Office and officers. That very same year Alberta hosted 13 countries at the World Schools Debating Championships in, of all places, Medicine Hat. It was a tremendous week for Alberta and for Canada. It was one of the first world schools debating competitions, and I can tell you that the spirit of camaraderie and the support from the people in the Medicine Hat community were second to none. It told me that if democracy was alive and well in Edmonton and Calgary and the major centres of this province, it was especially vibrant in our smaller cities and our smaller communities, and I had an opportunity to observe that first-hand.

The lessons that I personally learned as a student debater and later as a coach and through my work over the subsequent 20-odd years with various organizations across Canada made it clear to me that the skills, the character, and the values which good debate exemplifies – and these are things such as sound reasoning, tolerance, respect, critical thinking, and above all, Mr. Speaker, the commitment and discipline and ability to stand up and argue both sides of a question with equal conviction – are at the very heart of democracy and our democratic institutions.

When I retired as president of the Canadian Student Debating Federation, at that time an estimated 20,000 students in over 6,000 schools across Canada were actively participating in debate and speech programs in their schools. Our annual national debate seminar by that year had been held in every province in Canada, quite often not in the capital city of the province. I think it was at that time, Mr. Speaker, that I came to fully appreciate that our *raison d'être* in the parliamentary process, in democracy was about much more than assisting young people to develop effective speaking skills. We and, in fact, the education professionals that continue to carry this program forward today were helping them to develop a perspective on their community, their province, their country, and their time and place in history and, most importantly, how to make the most of the opportunities that are afforded to them.

I also came to believe that our success and stature as a province and as a nation would depend largely on our commitment to nurturing the highest possible level of public discourse on the issues of our times. Indeed, as George Bernard Shaw observed, “A man never tells you anything until you contradict him.” In that spirit, Mr. Speaker, as I commence my duties on behalf of the constituents of Edmonton-Rutherford, I do so with the sincere belief that we need to strive for more than representation of our constituents. I believe we also have a crucial role as facilitators of debate and enablers of our constituents’ participation in the democratic process.

5:10

How do we do that, Mr. Speaker? Well, like many people have alluded to through the course of the replies to the Speech from the Throne, we do it by example, and that is to say by modelling the highest standards of debate ourselves within this Assembly; actively engaging our constituents in debate and discussion at the community level, as so many of the returning members here have done very, very successfully over the years; and encouraging them to talk candidly about not only problems but solutions to the often complex issues that are the subject of debate in this House. On a broader level I believe we must engage our constituents in designing the kind of future we dare to hope for for Alberta and for the generations to follow ours. I believe this is one of the most important things we are called to do as members of this Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, His Honour in the throne speech talked about the importance of our work as members and emphasized in particular the trust Albertans have placed in us to build a strong and stable future for this province. During the election campaign and like, I’m sure, all of my colleagues, my constituents in Edmonton-Rutherford shared concerns that are familiar and that extend beyond our term as elected members: things like keeping up with rising costs in our booming economy, ensuring safe and secure communities, the need for enhanced home and health supports to enable seniors and others living on fixed incomes to live independently and with dignity in the community, the reduction in health care waiting times, that is so urgently required, to name a few. We also talked about the need to expand our economy with a focus on the knowledge sector and providing the roads, schools, postsecondary facilities, and other public infrastructure we need for the future responsible and sustainable development of our province. We also talked at great length about how we could be better stewards of our environment.

But most of all, Mr. Speaker, what constituents talked to me about in the past election campaign was their desire to become re-engaged in the democratic process, and by that claim I mean no disrespect to the 791 Members of the Legislative Assembly that have preceded us. You have all spent many hours working at the community level with constituents, and we have talked at great length about concerns and issues that affect their day-to-day lives.

But what I did detect on this occasion that was different from any experience I’d had or heard about in the past was a desire to be engaged in a discussion about the future of Alberta, to look to Members of the Legislative Assembly as facilitators of that debate that I talked about earlier, to seek out opportunities to actually engage people in the discussion and to draw on their knowledge and experience, particularly when it comes to social policy, for example, with those who are working on the front line. I’ve noticed many, many times over the years that in health care, for example, it’s often the health care professionals, the people working on the front line of the system, the people that have to put patients first every day, that have some of the best and most innovative ideas about how to improve our health care system, and I’m sure that’s true for many other sectors of the economy.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, I would again like to express my appreciation to my new colleague members, to the constituents of Edmonton-Rutherford, in particular to my wife, Jennifer, and my own family for their encouragement over the years. This was not an easy decision. I spent a number of years writing speeches, gave a lot of them as a student but in recent years have not had the opportunity or the privilege to give them myself.

I think we face some very exciting times ahead of us. The throne speech sets out a road map. It is not a prescription for what is in the public interest, and on this point I would respectfully disagree with the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. I think that what is in the public interest is for Albertans to decide and to communicate to us, and our responsibility is to listen and to act. That is the pledge that I and, I know, all of you have equally made in your respective constituencies.

I think the words of Sir Winston Churchill are particularly appropriate for this process of replying to the throne speech. For new members, speaking for myself, they provide tremendous encouragement for the challenge that I know is ahead of me. He said:

Every day you may make progress. Every step may be faithful. Yet there will stretch out before you an ever-lengthening, ever-ascending, ever-improving path. You know you will never get to the end of the journey. But this, so far from discouraging, only adds to the joy and glory of the climb.

I would humbly submit, Mr. Speaker, for my part, that's my wish for all of us here in the 27th Legislative Assembly.

Thank you.

**The Deputy Speaker:** We have five minutes according to Standing Order 29(2)(a) for questions and comments.

Seeing none and that the time has gone so fast – it's 5:15 – I would like to call on the Government House Leader.

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that we adjourn.

**The Deputy Speaker:** I would like to recognize the Deputy Government House Leader.

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am absolutely in awe of the incredible speeches that have been offered today by our members, particularly those offering their maiden speeches. I think we should take a pause to reflect, so I'll allow you to do that.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The Government House Leader already spoke about the throne speech, so we need our deputy House leader to move to adjourn.

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** I was just about to do that, Mr. Speaker. I was just saying that we should pause to reflect, and therefore I'd like to move that we call it 5:30 and adjourn the throne speech debate.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:19 p.m.]







## Table of Contents

Wednesday, April 23, 2008

Introduction of Visitors .....	163
Introduction of Guests .....	163
Members' Statements	
Dr. Martha Kostuch .....	163
Improving Public Education in Alberta .....	164
Shinia Van .....	164
Rotary Club of St. Albert Music Festival .....	164
Calgary Board of Education .....	164
St. George's Day .....	164
Presenting Petitions .....	165
Introduction of Bills	
Bill 6 Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2008 .....	165
Oral Question Period	
Farm Safety .....	166
Bitumen Royalties .....	166
Heritage Savings Trust Fund .....	166
Oil Price Forecasting .....	167
Nuclear Power .....	167
Health Care Spending .....	168
Recruitment of Foreign Health Care Professionals .....	168
Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped .....	169
Property Taxes .....	169
Social Services Agencies .....	169
Income Support Levels .....	170
Recycling .....	170
Highway Maintenance .....	171
Provincial Environmental Initiatives .....	171
Police Officer Supply .....	172
Health Care Premiums .....	172
Water Management .....	173
Cumulative Environment Effects .....	173
Tabling Returns and Reports .....	174
Tablings to the Clerk .....	174
Statement by the Speaker	
Committee of Supply Procedure .....	174
Government Motions	
Provincial Fiscal Policies .....	175, 183
Consideration of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech .....	179, 185

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