



Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday, February 11, 2009

Issue 2

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Second Session

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

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

Officers and Officials of the Legislative Assembly

Clerk	W.J. David McNeil	Senior Parliamentary Counsel	Shannon Dean
Clerk Assistant/ Director of House Services	Louise J. Kamuchik	Sergeant-at-Arms	Brian G. Hodgson
Clerk of <i>Journals</i> /Table Research	Micheline S. Gravel	Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms	J. Ed Richard
Senior Parliamentary Counsel	Robert H. Reynolds, QC	Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms	William C. Semple
		Managing Editor of <i>Alberta Hansard</i>	Liz Sim

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, February 11, 2009

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Welcome back.

Let us pray. Grant that we the members of our province's Legislature fulfill our office with honesty and integrity. May our first concern be for the good of all of our citizens. Let us be guided by these principles in our deliberations this day and every day. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Aboriginal Relations.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What a great pleasure it is to introduce to you and through you some of Alberta's very brightest students who are here today from my constituency, from the wonderful Donnan elementary school. There are two classroom groups here visiting us today with their teachers and group leaders Ms Fiona White, Mr. Larry Goodwin, Mrs. Donna Machinski, Mrs. Claire Titus, Mr. Cory Packard, Miss Danielle Belanger, Miss Tennille Oppen, Mrs. Nadine Oszytko, Mrs. Jacque Verenka, and Mrs. Melinda Robertson. I would ask all of the students, their teachers, and their helpers to please rise, and why don't the rest of us greet them with a warm welcome. Thank you for coming.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me as well to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly 29 grade 6 students from Westbrook elementary school located in my constituency of Edmonton-Whitemud. Accompanying the students is their teacher, Chantel Oswald, along with parent helpers Mrs. Shelley Richmond and Mr. Rami Bader. All of the grade 6 students from this class have been currently participating in the School at the Legislature program in this school year.

Mr. Speaker, I recently had the privilege of visiting Westbrook school and speaking with four classes of grade 6 students, and I can assure you that they ask the best questions on all of the relevant current issues. They raised excellent questions. They're very engaged. The School at the Legislature program is doing well for these students.

My guests are seated in the members' gallery, Mr. Speaker, and I'd ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: I suspect that the answers were of equal quality.

The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have one very special introduction this afternoon. It is a great pleasure today for me to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly Mr. Hunter Wight. Many members will likely know Hunter from his role at Mount Royal College as vice-president of external relations, which happens to be in my constituency of Calgary-Elbow. I'd ask all members to join me in extending the warm welcome of this Assembly to Mr. Wight.

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

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly two very important people from Covenant Health: Mr. Patrick Dumelie, president and CEO, and Dr. John Brennan, board chair. They're here today to raise awareness for the World Day of the Sick, which occurs every year on February 11. This day acts as a reminder to Catholics to ensure that people in need have special quality access to health care. It is also created to promote reflection and appreciation of the importance of each volunteer and individual effort to heal the sick.

On Monday, February 9, I attended an event at St. Joseph's Basilica for Covenant Health celebrating their missioning. Over 400 people attended this event, including the hon. Premier and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

I would like to thank Covenant Health for their work in spreading their message and their awareness and ask these two gentlemen to rise to receive the traditional warm greeting of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Weadick: Thank you very much. I'd like to take this opportunity to introduce to you and through you to all the members of this Assembly a fine young man from Lethbridge, Alberta, Mr. Luke Malcolm. He's a student at the University of Lethbridge, lives in my riding, is very involved in politics and all sorts of good things on campus and in the community. He's studying finance and political science and finishes his degree this year. I'd like to pass on a warm welcome to Luke if he'd just rise, please.

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

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'd like to introduce to you and through you definitely the most beautiful person in this Assembly: my girlfriend, Ashley Millar. As many of the members know, in this job you need to have a strong support system, and Ashley has been with me since – we actually had our first date a year and a half ago today. She wanted to come and see what we actually do here. I would like the Assembly to give her the traditional warm welcome of this House.

Thank you.

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce a friend and supporter in my constituency office, Mr. Marcel Durand, president of the constituency, in fact a great, thoughtful, and committed person for democracy and for the future of this province. I'd ask him to stand and receive the welcome of this Assembly.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly my constituency assistant from my Calgary-West constituency. Laura Wells is in the gallery, and I'd ask that she rise and receive the applause of the members.

Members' Statements

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

Alberta Initiative for School Improvement

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past week Albertan innovation proved second to none as educators came together to showcase new ideas for improving student learning. On February 9 and 10 teachers, school administrators, school board trustees, parents, and community members participated in the eighth annual Alberta initiative for school improvement, or AISI, conference. The conference showcased over 50 creative, locally tailored projects developed by school jurisdictions from across Alberta. These projects ranged from focusing on technology and literacy to at-risk students and high school completion.

The 2009 AISI conference was a great success. Over 800 people attended, including government and school representatives from Alberta-accredited schools in Macau and Hong Kong, who came to experience the outstanding work of our schools. The 2009 conference marked the end of AISI cycle 3, and school jurisdictions are now in the planning process for cycle 4. AISI has become an important part of maintaining Alberta's position as a leader in learning. It has changed the way the education system works to improve student learning and achievement.

Mr. Speaker, I'm thrilled to have the opportunity to recognize all the partners in AISI and all those involved in this year's conference. Their commitment and dedication to AISI is the reason this initiative is such a success and has such a positive impact on student learning in our great province.

Thank you.

Charles Darwin's Birthday Bicentennial

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, February 12 marks the bicentennial of the birth of a remarkable naturalist and scientist, Charles Darwin. Charles Robert Darwin was born in the small English town of Shrewsbury in 1809. In 1831 as a 22-year old Cambridge graduate he set sail on a five-year voyage on His Majesty's Ship the *Beagle*, a voyage which gave him new insights into the nature of living things and which would change the course of biological sciences forever.

On this voyage Darwin's keen observations led him to notice relationships of fossil species and living species of animals. On the Galapagos Islands he noted that each island in the small archipelago was inhabited by tortoises with different-shape shells and by closely related finches, differentiated by the dimensions of their bills. These and many other observations led Darwin to discover natural selection as the fundamental force in the evolution of species. Darwin knew that these ideas would challenge the religious dogma of those days, and he did not publish his conclusions until 1858 when a contemporary biologist, Alfred Russel Wallace, was independently developing the same ideas.

1:40

In 1859 he published his most famous book, *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*. This epic-making work quickly sold out, went through five more editions, and at the time was both violently attacked and energetically defended but in the end was almost universally accepted by the scientific world. Since his death his ideas have been vindicated by modern fields of science, including paleontology, taxonomy, biogeography, animal behaviour, and especially by genetics and the ability to read the genome of man and other living creatures.

Charles Darwin died on April 19, 1882, and was buried in Westminster Abbey, where he reposes amongst the greatest minds of the English-speaking world.

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

Voter Participation

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Voter apathy continues to be a big concern not only to me but to many Albertans. In fact, I have received correspondence from several constituents expressing their concern regarding voter apathy, particularly among younger Albertans, and they have suggested a number of ways to help make the electoral process more inclusive, from the creation of a citizens' assembly on electoral reform to the introduction of proportional representation.

It is well known that in the last election only 41 per cent of eligible Albertans cast their ballots. This is certainly a challenge that is complex yet important to the future of this province. It's tempting to look for quick-fix solutions, but we must take a more balanced, steady, and ultimately conciliatory approach to this challenge. We must do whatever we can to encourage young people to become involved in communities and in the election of governments even if that means looking at new and innovative ideas within our current government and democratic processes.

However, Mr. Speaker, I also challenge more young people to take the lead and be the first of their friends and peers to become involved in what I consider to be the purest and most fundamental democratic institution in our political system. The concept of political parties is a mechanism to mobilize similar-minded individuals in the form of a formal electoral coalition, and I mean formal electoral coalition, not an unelected coalition, which we were recently exposed to. I would encourage the many young people in Alberta that are frustrated to get involved in these institutions. It is this action that I believe will have the greatest impact on the future of this province. With both sides working together, more of Alberta's young people will see the value in investing in the mechanisms of government and democracy that will help ensure future success for all Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

International Disability Film Festival

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week I had the opportunity to take part in the eighth annual Picture This international disability awards festival. Picture This is Canada's first and biggest international disability film festival. It promotes films that focus on any area of disability culture as well as films on any subject that are produced, directed, or written by a person with a disability. The basic idea is to create a greater understanding of the culture of people with disabilities. It is also an excellent opportunity for the cultural community in Calgary to connect with others around the world and to promote an international understanding of these issues.

This excellent festival is organized by the Calgary Scope Society, a nonprofit organization that has been improving the lives of persons with developmental disabilities in the Calgary area for over 25 years. I was thrilled with this gala evening, and I'm sure the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports, whom I was pleased to see in attendance, also appreciated this amazing event. It was held at La Joie de Vivre, a wonderful, accessible venue, and I thank the hosts for their hard work and help.

Supporting these kinds of initiatives, events that are both fun and worthwhile, is one of the things I enjoy most about representing downtown Calgary. Furthermore, projects that raise awareness about the challenges and experience of individuals with disabilities in Calgary, in our province, and, in fact, around the world are an important part of building inclusive communities. This event helps us all recognize the true strength of our diverse cultures, and I want

to congratulate all the filmmakers for their sterling efforts. Each one has made a significant contribution to our artistic heritage.

Picture This also tours in Edmonton, Red Deer, Lethbridge, and rural Alberta, so I strongly encourage Albertans to watch for it. You'll have a great experience.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

EarthRenew Manure Processing Facility

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak of an important and exciting bioenergy innovation taking place in my riding of Strathmore-Brooks. As Albertans are doing their part to reduce greenhouse gases, an Alberta-based company is taking the lead in environmental stewardship in our agriculture sector. One week ago today I attended the official opening of EarthRenew's Strathmore 1, the first agricultural waste processing plant of its kind in the world. Strathmore 1 is located at Cattleland Feedyards and is owned and operated by EarthRenew, a privately funded Calgary-based company that continues to grow throughout North America with new facilities under construction in western Canada, California, and the U.S. Midwest.

An industrial gas-powered turbine cooks cattle waste – feedlot manure, the proverbial – to 530 degrees, in the process killing all weed seeds and pathogens while preserving the all-natural organic matter. Organic matter fertilizer is a product used to increase yields for organic and our conventional farming. The output from the efficient gas-powered turbine generates enough electricity for approximately 3,000 homes and recaptures 80 per cent of the fuel used for the further process.

EarthRenew's Strathmore 1 employs 20 staff, and in total this operation expects to invest about \$3 million this year in labour and supplies in the Strathmore economy. In addition, this plant achieves a substantial reduction in carbon emissions, up to 100,000 tonnes per year, by processing the proverbial.

This green, cutting-edge technology illustrates the innovation and entrepreneurial spirit so important to Alberta's success. I look forward to further application of this technology in other areas of our province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

John Kucera

Mr. Rodney: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past weekend John Kucera of Calgary skied his way into the history books. He became the first Canadian man to win the downhill gold medal at the world alpine championships in Val d'Isère, France. John started second and crossed the finish line after a breathtaking and nearly flawless two minutes, seven and one one-hundredth seconds. He then had to wait patiently while each of the world's best downhillers tried and failed to beat his time. Kucera's tight line down the mountain was the difference between him and his closest competitor, who was only .04 seconds behind.

John was born in Calgary to parents who had recently immigrated from the Czech Republic. In order to fund his skiing, they took out a second mortgage on their home, and was it ever worth it. The young Kucera made his World Cup debut at age 20 on home snow in Lake Louise in November 2004, and just two years later at the very same location he won his first World Cup GS. John's most recent win comes exactly one year before the opening of the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics and the games' first medal event, coincidentally the men's downhill.

The path to the podium starts in this province, Mr. Speaker. Our Alberta government has committed nearly a hundred million dollars to renew Olympic legacy facilities at Canada Olympic Park and the Canmore Nordic Centre. Funding also supports the building of Canada's first centre of sports excellence, and Canada's Sports Hall of Fame will soon call the city of Calgary home, with the government of Alberta as an integral partner. Because of these provincial projects and efforts like those of John Kucera, I believe that Canadians will win Olympic gold on Canadian soil for the first time next year.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 2

Lobbyists Amendment Act, 2009

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to request leave to introduce Bill 2, the Lobbyists Amendment Act, 2009.

The Lobbyists Act prohibits individuals from providing paid advice to government at the same time and on the same issue as they are paid to lobby government. Amendments in Bill 2 will strengthen and clarify the application of this prohibition against a dual role. Amendments will also limit the concept of associated persons, so spouses are not included, and will add to the list of individuals who are considered to be public office holders. Along with some housekeeping amendments Bill 2 also gives the Ethics Commissioner authority to disclose information when necessary to enforce administrative penalties. Bill 2 will enhance the functioning and enforceability of the Lobbyists Act and ensure it meets the needs of Albertans.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 2 read a first time]

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Global Economic Downturn

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are six months into one of the worst economic downturns in our history. Albertans are anxious about their jobs, investments, and opportunities, looking for leadership – clear, strong leadership – on the economic woes that are hitting Albertans hard. In the last two months we've seen 20,000 jobs lost. To the Premier: why hasn't the government acted decisively to support these people, getting them back to work as soon as possible?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, first of all, allow me to congratulate the newly elected Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Speaker, I also wish to express feeling toward those that have lost their jobs in the province of Alberta. That's why we've articulated a three-point plan to ensure that we move very decisively during this difficult period. Part of that, of course, is tightening our belt during these economic times, looking at our spending. We will continue to invest in people and infrastructure and make sure that our economy is ready to bounce back when things improve. Most importantly, we will draw down on the emergency savings that we've set aside especially for times like these.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that just last week the Premier announced tax credits for parts of the oil and gas sector, will he take immediate similar action with other struggling sectors in the province?

Mr. Stelmach: With respect to any tax credit announcements, there weren't any. I made a commitment at the very same speech that the hon. leader was at to work with the oil and gas industry. They're in a credit crunch. They cannot access capital, and that translates to significant job losses not only in Calgary, not only in Edmonton but in every small community in this province right down to the tire shop, down to the motel and the restaurant. That's why we're working with the oil industry to make sure that we provide the right environment for them to move ahead and create jobs in Alberta.

Dr. Swann: Many thousands recently laid off and many thousands more who feel increasingly fearful and vulnerable need to see action today. They need certainty. When can they expect real action from this government?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we've taken action. Part of that is the fact that we're the only jurisdiction that I know of in North America that actually has cash set aside for situations like this, so that's really good planning on our part. Secondly, we're committed, as I said before, to investing in people programs: retraining, making sure that we have the skills necessary as we come out of this recession, that we have the people in place to fill the many job vacancies that will be here. In terms of specifics, other ministers can give all of the specifics with respect to the programs we have.

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

Health Care Spending

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At a point where this government needs to show confidence and sound, responsible leadership, the Ministry of Health and Wellness is projecting a \$1.3 billion deficit. To the Premier: how can the Premier account for this to Albertans?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, as far as the accounting of last year's expenses, that goes to the Public Accounts Committee, and they'll review that. But I just want to clearly state to Albertans that we are committed to publicly funded health care in this province, and we're committed to the principles of the Canada Health Act.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, we're talking about sound fiscal management of our health system. It's very clear that there has been no plan or foresight in our health reforms. Does the Premier himself or the minister take responsibility for this astonishing financial fiasco?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the current budget in health is over \$13 billion. That's about \$36 million a day. I've asked the minister to work with our health care providers – the doctors, the nurses, the professionals – to come together and put on the table opportunities to gain efficiencies, improve access, improve quality of care in this province. I think there's a lot of money. Let's make sure that we're getting the best value for the dollar that's there. We have to improve programs. We'll certainly do that, but overall I'm looking to health care providers to join us, because we're in this together, and deliver a plan that will build those three objectives that I talked about.

Dr. Swann: Does the Premier believe he has the confidence of Albertans in relation to a related critical service Albertans have come to stake their lives upon? I'm referring to the restructuring plan for the ambulance system. How much is that going to cost?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, in working with municipalities, our health minister is working towards, of course, the government taking over these services and is working very hard. To the specifics, the minister can answer that directly.

The Speaker: The hon. minister to supplement.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I think what we need to do is not look at the transfer of governance and funding for ambulance as a cost but an improvement in efficiencies. We have already budgeted – it's in the budget that was passed in this House last year – the allocation for the transfer of ambulance services. As I say, I think we need to look at this as part of efficiencies.

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

Provincial Budget Release

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. People the world over are scared by this fast and deepening recession, and they're looking to their governments for leadership, leadership that will make people feel confident again. This government continues to dither and delay the budget and won't provide Albertans with a date for its release. British Columbia and Saskatchewan already have release dates for their budgets. To the Minister of Finance and Enterprise: when will the minister be releasing her budget?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, as everybody in this Assembly knows, the date of budget release is something that we do not announce until we're prepared to come forward with a budget and table it for Albertans. That should not breed any disrespect or lack of confidence among Albertans. That, in fact, should state quite clearly, as the Premier has articulated, that we look first at the federal budget, that we're watching very closely what the Americans, who are our largest market for exports, are doing, what the outcomes are from a number of the issues that we have been working on resolving both with Canada and with other governments. We're monitoring very carefully on a daily basis exactly what's happening in the most volatile time in our history for the economy.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that cities, universities, schools, hospitals, and for that matter a lot of private businesses and not-for-profits are impeded in their own planning as they wait for this government to release its budget, will the minister admit that any further delays will only worsen the situation and commit to releasing the budget this month?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I will not commit to releasing the budget this month. I think our Premier has articulated the three-point plan we're working on. Those kinds of assurances of reduced spending, of looking at our budget prudently, of looking at what the other circumstances are as we look over the global economy and the things that I've just cited should give Albertans the confidence that we're acting responsibly. Our throne speech yesterday and the people in this Assembly that want to speak to it will I think convey the

confidence we feel in Albertans for the outcomes that will follow with or without that budget within the next couple of months.

Mr. Taylor: Within the next couple of months, Mr. Speaker? Given that briefly two years ago this government did commit to releasing its budget in February, two weeks following the throne speech, and last year that got delayed because the election got in the way, is the minister proposing to this House this year that she's going to wait until the recession is out of the way?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, obviously, the member opposite knows exactly what every Albertan no doubt knows, and that is that last year in July we had \$147 oil. Last year in August we were anticipating that we would have much higher surpluses than were obvious and have continued to be obvious over this period of time. I think that Albertans, being sensible people, will want us to get the story as right as possible in this budget rather than rush it.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Global Economic Downturn (continued)

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Around the world governments of all political stripes are recognizing that we face the greatest economic threat since the Dirty Thirties. These governments are making major commitments to restart their economies and put their people back to work. This is happening everywhere, Mr. Speaker, everywhere except in Alberta. Why has this Premier, almost alone among political leaders, ignored the rising storm and left Alberta families to fend for themselves?

2:00

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the big difference between the province of Alberta and the other jurisdictions is that we are not going to put the next generation back in debt. Those are his friends. That's not prudent budgeting on behalf of this government, so we're not going to follow the advice of that individual or any other government. We will do our own budget based on the most recent evidence we have both from the federal government and from the United States, and we're going to make a budget that ensures that we don't again put the next generation in debt.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, while upgrader after upgrader gets cancelled in Alberta's Industrial Heartland, those in the U.S. are still building. Entirely dependent on Alberta bitumen these U.S. projects are stealing Alberta jobs. It's a crime, and this government is driving the getaway car. Why won't this Premier keep his promise to end the export of unprocessed bitumen together with thousands of Alberta jobs down that pipeline?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I made a commitment some time ago in terms of upgrading our resources in Alberta. As a government we remain committed, and we will very soon be communicating the plan in terms of how we're going to add value to our resources. It's not only in the oil sands but forestry and agriculture, by the way, where we've taken just a monumental step, the only jurisdiction, I believe, in Canada to take the leadership we have in agriculture and selling that product around the world.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This government is a deer in the headlights. Faced with looming economic disaster, it doesn't know which way to turn. This economic crisis is like an 18-wheeler bearing down on Albertans. Will this Premier give his head a shake and take immediate measures to create real jobs before Alberta families become roadkill?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I don't know why it's so difficult to get through to some on that side of the House that we're the only jurisdiction in North America that is debt free and the only jurisdiction to have cash in hand to help deal with this critical global recession. There is no other jurisdiction. Let's use the resources wisely and not allow it to drop through our fingers. We have time to budget prudently. We will. We'll do whatever we can on our part to make sure that we take care of all Albertans.

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

Employment Supports

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Hardly a day goes by when we don't hear about another company laying off its workers. My question is to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. What is the government doing to create new jobs in this province?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Although we are seeing some increases in unemployment, we know that Alberta's labour market will remain quite strong for many years to come. With unemployment rates around the 4 per cent level, at least statistically that's still a very, very tight labour market. Individuals need to move around the province to be able to find additional opportunities. As the hon. member knows, it's really not the government's role to create new jobs, but it is our role to create the environment in which the private sector might create jobs.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The fact remains that there are people who are out of work, including many from Edmonton. What are you doing to support them?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To help those who are not working, my department helps workers find other jobs now or train for jobs in the future. We connect the unemployed people with employers through proactive workforce adjustment strategies such as recruitment fairs. Just today, for example, we're connecting potential workers with Wilco Industries. They are looking for workers in one of our Edmonton offices. We assist the unemployed with career planning, some job searching skills, resumé preparation, and job interview skills.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question to the same minister: are you taking any specific steps to support our most vulnerable citizens or underrepresented groups in the workforce?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, yes is the answer. Very specifically, we are offering training partnerships between employers and aboriginal people, for instance. As an example, that includes our aboriginal training to employment programs, which has now more than 50 projects on the go. We do support people with disabilities in their quest for training and employment by providing them with supports such as assisted services and technologies. We support immigrants by assessing how their foreign qualifications compare to Alberta standards. We'll also still be offering some summer employment programs to give our young people meaningful employment opportunities.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Pharmaceutical Benefit for Seniors

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With the economic times that we are facing, middle fixed-income seniors feel that they're under attack because of the government's proposed changes to the pharmaceutical coverage for seniors in Alberta. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: does the minister admit that the proposed plan for seniors' pharmaceutical coverage is flawed and will disadvantage seniors on fixed middle incomes when they have seen a significant decrease through no fault of their own in their RRSPs?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, the pharmaceutical strategy that was announced last fall clearly is part of aligning the health system. All of the government assistance programs – and let's ensure that we understand that this is a government assistance program; this is not something that is covered under the Canada Health Act – are aligned with income. What we have done is simply move the seniors' pharmaceutical plan to align with other government programs.

Ms Pastoor: Will the minister admit to Alberta seniors that many of them are going to be paying significantly more for their needed medications as compared to their former prescription plan and other provinces?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, the fact is that some 50 to 60 per cent of seniors will actually pay less, and in many cases many seniors will not have to pay anything for their prescription drug plan. We can look at it as a half empty glass or a one-third empty glass as the member may be looking at it; I look at it as a benefit to those senior citizens who do need the assistance.

Ms Pastoor: For those on middle fixed incomes would the minister consider raising the threshold so that more seniors would qualify for the zero per cent deductions?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, there's no question that since the program was designed and announced, we have seen quite a different situation relative to income in the environment we live in today. I have asked our folks to take a look at all aspects of the drug program. Let's keep in mind that nothing has changed; the implementation date is January of 2010. We want to ensure that we've got it right. If there is a situation that has changed since that time, we want to re-examine it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Infrastructure Spending

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The global economy is in the midst of an uphill climb. Alberta is in a better position than most jurisdictions, but we are not immune to the current economic pressures. There has been a lot of talk about stimulus packages and job losses. My question is for the Minister of Transportation. What is his department doing to counteract these economic pressures and help to stimulate the Alberta economy?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, as you know, Alberta's three-year capital plan is more than \$23 billion – \$23 billion – and as Minister of Transportation my job is to build the roads and other projects that Alberta needs. My department will be tendering projects and moving ahead with those jobs this year. As a government we believe it's important to continue investing in our highway network, and that's exactly what we're going to do.

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Infrastructure: can the minister comment on what Alberta Infrastructure is doing despite the global economic downturn to stimulate infrastructure investment in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. High levels of infrastructure investment are more important today than they've ever been before. We as a government will continue to be a leader in stimulating the economy with these activities in Alberta. Alberta currently spends two to three times per capita that of any other province or territory in our nation and arguably more than anywhere else in North America. Our current three-year capital plan includes \$5 billion for municipalities for their infrastructure support, \$3.3 billion for health facilities and equipment support, \$1.6 billion for schools, and the list goes on and on. We continue to invest at top levels to help Albertans.

Mrs. McQueen: Finally, Mr. Speaker, to the Minister of Transportation: can the minister elaborate on what initiatives will support construction activities in local communities?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, right now we're working with the federal government and municipalities to move ahead with much-needed projects. Last month along with the federal government we announced the building Canada communities component. That program has already invested more than \$76 million towards 22 municipal infrastructure projects throughout the province. The funding will help all smaller communities throughout Alberta meet their pressing infrastructure needs, support economic growth, and help stimulate the economy, and then all these communities can still apply up until March 15 for much-needed programs for them.

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

Swan Hills Treatment Centre

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Albertans have learned two things since the fall session: one, that even large companies like Nortel fail and, two, this government consistently fails to require that enough money is held in reclamation funds to

pay for the cost of the cleanup. My questions are to the Minister of Environment. Given the example of the Swan Hills waste treatment plant costing \$71 million to clean up, double the amount set aside, what action is the government taking to boost other reclamation funding to realistic levels so that the cost of future cleanups are covered and not borne by the taxpayer?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, it's important to consider when you look at reclamation not only the cost of the actual reclamation itself but the requirement that the taxpayer be responsible for the entire costs should it be necessary. The member is pointing out a worst-case scenario, where we have a situation where the taxpayer is ultimately responsible, but at the same time there are a number of other sites throughout the province that remain and will continue to be the responsibility of the owner of those sites, and in those cases it's a different situation.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Back to the same minister. Well, given that if a company, whether it's an oil sands developer, a coal mine, or a gravel pit, collapses, fails, goes bankrupt, goes under, their promissory note isn't worth very much, why doesn't the government ensure that enough cash is held so that any liability for cleanup does not revert back to the public? An IOU from a failed company is worth nothing, and it all defaults back to the taxpayer.

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's like everything else that we do in Environment: it's a balancing act. It is necessary for us to hold security, and we do hold security. We hold a significant amount of security, whether it be in cash or whether it be in irrevocable lines of credit that are backed up by banks. We have been working with industry to ensure that that level that we hold is appropriate and is adequate, and I can assure the member that there are ongoing discussions as we speak on ways that we can improve that program.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. Back to the same minister. The annual report of the security fund states that for all the oil sands \$645 million is held for reclamation, all in the form of guaranties, little IOUs, pieces of paper. Is the government telling us that these IOUs are sufficient to cover the cost of cleanup for the entire oil sands? Really, Mr. Minister?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, let's be clear. These are not IOUs. These are irrevocable lines of credit. These are notes that the province holds that are secured by the bank, not by the individual companies. To answer the member's question, we believe that we hold adequate security to ensure that we protect the public in case of long-term disaster from a financial perspective.

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

Temporary Foreign Workers

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In light of the downturn in our economy many employers and workers are confused about the requirements and options for temporary foreign workers and Canadian workers. My first question is for the Minister of Employment and Immigration. Is there still a need for temporary foreign workers when layoffs are happening?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our labour market is definitely changing, and we recognize that layoffs are happening in some businesses while others are still looking for people. The temporary foreign worker program is a federally run program, and it's based on employers identifying and providing a need for workers in very specific occupations. Temporary foreign workers still have a very, very important role to play in our workforce, but as employer needs change, so will the number of temporary foreign workers coming in.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is to the same minister. If temporary foreign workers still have a role in our workforce alongside Canadians, how does the treatment differ?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We recognize that all workers make very valuable contributions to this province, including our temporary foreign workers, and these temporary foreign workers have the same rights as any other worker. They are all provided for and protected under a number of pieces of legislation that we have. Presently we've got ads that are running, campaigns to raise the awareness of temporary foreign workers' rights in the workplace. Employers and workers can find a lot more on our website.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the same minister. What support does the government provide to temporary foreign workers who are having their hours cut back or losing their jobs?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, we are hearing of that more and more. I want to indicate that temporary foreign workers can remain in Canada for the duration of their work permit and apply for work with other employers with federal hiring permits, or staff can assist in making those connections and in helping foreign workers move from one job to the other. If they cannot find work, one of the options is that they can return to their home country.

Environmental Charges against Syncrude

Mr. Hehr: Today, Mr. Speaker, I hope to appeal to the Justice minister to take the necessary steps to protect Alberta's wildlife and its habitat. Specifically, I was going to discuss section 155 of the Alberta environmental protection act. My math tells me that a \$500,000 fine is 1,000 bucks a duck. Seeing that this is a multibillion-dollar industry, does the hon. minister figure that this maximum fine is an effective deterrent?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe that although the hon. member has addressed that question to me, this falls under the policy area of the Minister of Environment.

The Speaker: The hon member has the floor.

Mr. Hehr: Okay. Anyway, I was asking about section 155 and the maximum penalty allowed under there, which is \$500,000. Do you think this is an effective mechanism for actually keeping this industry from being negligent?

The Speaker: Hon. minister, the purpose of question period is not to solicit personal opinions.

2:20

Mr. Renner: As the member knows, the amount of fine that's assessed is the responsibility of the courts. I want to remind this member that this case is before the courts.

As to the legislation itself and the policy with respect to fines I do believe that we have adequate penalties within our legislation to ensure that we can hold polluters responsible. Let's not forget, Mr. Speaker, that there are two sides that need to be taken into account. One is the actual penalty itself, and one is the effects that these kinds of incidents have on the customers' and the public's perception of the way these companies do business.

Mr. Hehr: To the Minister of Environment: can you honestly tell me that a \$500,000 fine to an industry that is making billions of dollars in profits is adequate to actually keep these guys in check?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, using that kind of logic, one would say that a hundred dollar speeding ticket issued to an NHL hockey player has no effect. I would suggest that we don't at this point in Alberta adjust our fines to the level of income. This is a piece of legislation that applies to all members of the public, and a \$500,000 fine is a lot of money in my books.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Job Creation

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday at the same time that this government was delivering a throne speech full of vague platitudes, Millar Western laid off nearly 140 workers and warned them that more cuts were coming. This pulp and lumber company has been in business for more than a century, and this government has no strategy to help them with their workers. The only specific thing this government offered to people like these losing their jobs was Alberta Works counselling. To the minister of employment: why have you failed these workers and left them struggling to feed their families?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Employment and Immigration.

Mr. Goudreau: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The announcement certainly was made yesterday. We do as a government extend our greatest sympathy to the people who have lost their jobs because of these closures and to their families as well. We understand that the facility closures are a business decision based on market conditions and long-term corporate strategy. We have been working with and have contacted people from Millar Western, and we are just assessing now and actually are working and seeing what we can do to help the staff cope.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, in January we lost 5,700 jobs in Alberta. Instead of creating jobs, government is telling the

unemployed that it's going to make welfare more visible. What Albertans need are real, long-term jobs because, believe me, Alberta's future generations will have debt if the only thing this government can offer their parents is resumé-writing courses. To the same minister: will you push investment and stimulus spending that creates jobs at living wages instead of merely putting up more signs in our welfare offices?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, a couple of things. One is that in January of this year we, in fact, had 23,000 more people working in the province of Alberta than we had a year ago in January. Although our numbers in unemployment are increasing, I need to remind the hon. member that our unemployment levels at present stand at 4.4 per cent, and although we're heading in the wrong direction, that is still considered a very, very tight employment situation. As I indicated, we still have a lot of companies looking for people.

Ms Notley: Well, interestingly, this morning, Mr. Speaker, Grande Cache Coal gave walking papers to 100 employees, so clearly that's not one of those companies. Globally, meanwhile, at least \$650 billion has been committed by governments to stimulus spending that will create real jobs. Even this government's federal cousins were forced to pledge \$12 billion for job-stimulating infrastructure, yet not one new job creation initiative was discussed yesterday by this government. To the same minister: do you really believe that all these laid-off workers need are directions to the nearest welfare office, and if not, why is that all that your government is offering?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, my responsibility as minister responsible for Employment and Immigration is to help people that are in need. We provide employment and training supports. We help with basic living and basic costs if that's what's required. We'll cover some of their household costs. We'll even support health benefits. We'll do everything to try to transition those individuals from having lost their jobs into finding a new position.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

RCMP Traffic Enforcement Duties

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recent media reports have suggested that the province is toying with ideas of pulling the RCMP from traffic duty on Alberta highways. The RCMP has had a long history in this province and serves my constituents in Whitecourt-St. Anne very well. I'd like to clarify these media reports when I go home this weekend. My questions are all to the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. Is the minister planning to replace the RCMP's traffic services with Alberta sheriffs?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The short answer to that question is no, absolutely not. What we are doing is testing four different service delivery models for traffic enforcement over a six-month period. This will help us to evaluate what works best on Alberta's highways to ensure that those motorists remain safe. The RCMP will always have a role in traffic enforcement on Alberta highways, and they are in full support of these pilots.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. Again, pilot projects are being announced throughout this province about some good working relationships between sheriffs and RCMP, but again my constituents in Whitecourt-St. Anne keep saying to me: is this the first step to replace the RCMP? Is this the first step, Mr. Minister?

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, I've said it many times, and I'll say it again: we are not replacing the RCMP as Alberta's provincial police force. We are proud to have them as our police force. The RCMP are a very highly skilled force, which helps ensure safe and secure communities for all Albertans. The RCMP and our traffic sheriffs, however, regularly participate in joint forces traffic operations with local police services and other government ministries. This pilot is a good example of the excellent co-operation between the RCMP and our traffic sheriffs.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, again to the same minister. The traffic pilot projects are being done in some cases to enhance the services, but in other cases media reports said that it's there only because of a cost-saving measure. Is this true or not?

Mr. Lindsay: Again, Mr. Speaker, these pilots are not about cost savings at all. What they are about is ensuring our highways are safe for all Albertans to travel on. Accidents on our highways cost over 450 lives last year and billions of dollars worth of expenses to our medical system. These pilots are aimed at improving our highway safety for all Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

Public-private Partnerships for School Construction

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The first contract for P3 schools was negotiated at the height of the boom, when materials and labour were at their most expensive. The government has claimed that P3s will save over a hundred million dollars, but those figures were made assuming inflated construction costs. Trustees, taxpayers, and opposition parties have no idea what the real cost of these schools will be over the contract's 32-year lifespan. To the Minister of Infrastructure: why won't the minister release documents showing the price tag for the construction and proposed 32-year maintenance of the first 18 P3 schools?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On our government web page we set out the conditions for payment throughout the contract. There is proprietary information that's contained within the agreements. The last agreement that we did saved Alberta taxpayers \$118 million, to be exact, based on comparative studies that are checked by third parties. It would disadvantage Albertans, the taxpayers, the people that are paying for this, to release information that would take the people that give us the best deals in the province out of the game.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. The minister is treating taxpayers like mushrooms under a load of we all know what. The contracts have already been signed. The competition is over. There is no need to hide the details. Given the current economic downturn and the lengthy delays in construction does the Minister of Infrastructure

still claim that these schools are being built faster and cheaper than they would have been through traditional methods?

Mr. Hayden: Mr. Speaker, absolutely.

Mr. Chase: Table the documents. So far it's all chat, and we all know what that's worth.

Given that the costs of labour and materials have fallen, will the government reconsider using P3 financing for its second phase of building 14 schools?

Mr. Hayden: Mr. Speaker, our government will take a look at every innovative way to provide infrastructure to Albertans, including P3s and everything else. Those things that work best for Albertans to deliver to Albertans in an effective, efficient, time-sensitive manner those facilities that they need: that's what we'll use, sir.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

2:30 Air and Water Quality of Industrial Development

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday during the throne speech we heard that this government is committed to develop energy with environmental care, and we've heard that an oil sands strategy is coming, but we also have areas of the province that are involved in upgrading and processing the crude. My question is to the Minister of Environment. My constituents want to know what action your department takes in the Industrial Heartland to ensure residents are not forced to live with dirty air because they live close to industrial development.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you know, some time ago we announced that we would establish through policy and legislation eventually overall emissions targets and thresholds that would be applied through a process of cumulative effect management in the Industrial Heartland. Just last month we finalized the targets for SO₂ and NO_x. Those targets are now in place. It will be up to industry working in partnership with Environment to ensure that we're able to expand the industrial activity within that region but still live within those predetermined caps for air emissions.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. Water is also clearly a priority as water for life was profiled in the throne speech yesterday. Can you tell my constituents what your department does to monitor the quality of our rivers, specifically water being returned from industry to the North Saskatchewan and the Athabasca?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, like we have ambient air quality monitoring as it affects the overall quality of air, we also do similar kinds of monitoring on the overall quality of water in the river. There are really two levels of monitoring. One is at the site of the discharge, be it city of Edmonton municipal discharge or industrial discharge, to ensure that that discharge is within the allocations that have been determined in their approval. Then the other is to have ongoing monitoring in the river itself to ensure that we're maintaining the quality of water within the river.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister. Some of my constituents echo that the water for life strategy is not just an environmental document but also an economic one. They've heard that a large majority of the North Saskatchewan's water flow has been allocated, yet a very minor percentage is actually being used. Can the minister tell us why that is and how your department is working to ensure that a situation like this does not become a barrier to new opportunities for economic development?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's not uncommon. In years past when water licences were issued, there really wasn't a lot of need to be concerned with whether or not the exact amount of allocation that was required was within that licence, and in fact for administrative ease I suspect that licences were issued that exceeded the amount to allow for expansion over time. At this point in time we're looking at things a little differently, so one of the things that we need to work on over the next period of time is a better accounting of the water that's actually being used. That will be very much a part of our go-forward strategy as we discuss water allocation policies.

Environmental Charges against Syncrude *(continued)*

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, on Monday evening on CBC radio I heard our hon. Justice minister discussing section 155 of the Alberta environmental protection act and the \$500,000 fine plus additional things judges may or may not do under the act. My math tells me that a \$500,000 fine is a thousand bucks a duck. Can the minister tell me whether this fine plus any additional things judges may or may not do is reasonable to protect Alberta citizens under the act?

The Speaker: Well, I'm going to repeat that personal opinion is not the purpose of question period.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I submit that this question has been asked and answered.

Mr. Hehr: So, basically, is the hon. minister telling us that she'll share her opinions with CBC radio and will not answer this question in this House right now?

The Speaker: The hon. minister?
The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Fair enough. I'm done on this questioning if those are the answers we're going to receive.

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

Ambulance Services

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are for the Minister of Health and Wellness. As part of the restructuring of the health care system communities have been given the option as to whether or not they would like to transfer their delivery of ambulance services over to provincial health services, the Alberta Health Services Board, as of April 1. The Camrose ambulance service, I believe, was one of the first to choose that option. I sense that there's some anxiety developing over whether or not everybody's going to be ready for the transfer on April 1. I'm wondering if the

minister can advise as to whether or not this transfer of ambulance services can be ready by April 1.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, the plan to transfer ambulance services is on track for April 1. As you know, we passed the Emergency Health Services Act in this House last fall, which set out the regulatory framework for the new model. Alberta Health Services will shortly be rolling out the dispatch plan, and that consolidates dispatch to three services from the current 10 or 12. So, yes, it is on track.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Olson: Thank you. If I can maybe be a little more specific about what the concerns are for the local municipalities there. Knowing that they may be ending the service, they're having to terminate contracts. They are not able to budget for delivery of those services. So I'm just wondering if there's a contingency plan in place for who will pay for that if we're not ready on April 1.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, let's be very clear that come April 1, if there is a municipality where there has been difficulty reaching agreement, whether they want to get out of the business or whether they want to contract with Alberta Health Services, there will be no interruption in patient care. A municipality will have to make a decision whether they're staying in the business or they're not, keeping in mind that on April 1 funding for municipalities is going to be covered 100 per cent by the province on the basis that we have contracts in place.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Olson: Thank you. I have a question about STARS. I think we'd all agree that STARS air ambulance is an integral part of the EMS team in Alberta, particularly from a rural point of view. I'm just wondering if the minister can share with us any information on the status of STARS in terms of how it will be supported during the transition and after.

Mr. Liepert: Well, I think it's important, Mr. Speaker, that while each one of us has our favourite providers, if you might, and STARS is probably a favourite provider of many in this Assembly, we have a number of air ambulance service contracts. STARS is no different than any of the other providers that have contracts with Alberta Health Services. They all provide a very integral part of ambulance provision. What we want to do initially is ensure that we get the ground ambulance right, and then we move on to discussions relative to the remainder of the services that are available.

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

Temporary Foreign Workers *(continued)*

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that over 20,000 Albertans have lost their jobs recently – as a matter of fact, 140 forestry workers in and around Whitecourt were laid off yesterday – my first question is to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. Why is the government of Alberta continuing to go abroad and recruit temporary foreign workers to this province?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think we need to recognize that although there are certainly people being laid off, those individuals as Albertans will always have first priority in terms of getting a job in this province. We automatically want to make sure that our priority goes to Albertans first, then Canadians and those people who are normally not necessarily represented in the workforce, including some of our aboriginal communities. Having said that, there are still some people out there and some jobs that remain unfilled, and we depend on the expertise and help of temporary foreign workers to fill those.

2:40

Mr. MacDonald: Again, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: how can this government recruit more temporary foreign workers when steelworkers in Edmonton are being laid off, construction workers across the province are being laid off, forestry workers in Whitecourt are being laid off? Why are you undermining the job market here by recruiting more temporary foreign workers?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, I have to reiterate that the temporary foreign worker program is a federal program and not a provincial program. But the important thing to keep in mind is that before a temporary foreign worker position is approved, the employers have to go through a very stringent process of advertising and trying to find Canadians to fill those particular jobs. Only when those cannot happen can they be allowed to bring in a temporary foreign worker.

Mr. MacDonald: Mr. Speaker, I remind the hon. minister that he is the Minister of Employment and Immigration. You're in this up to your eyeballs. Again, will the government terminate the temporary foreign worker program now, allow the workers that are here on the temporary foreign worker program to finish the time left on their visa? Considering the large number of Albertans that have been laid off, and these Albertans include landed immigrants, why don't you protect landed immigrants and citizens of this country when they need job protection from you?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, people from around the world are welcome in Alberta. Shutting the door to temporary foreign workers and immigration is not always the way to respond to economic challenges. This province was built by immigrants. Immigration will continue to be our future source of economic growth and population growth, and we want them here.

An Hon. Member: Don't treat them like second-class citizens.

Mr. Goudreau: We don't. They have the same rights.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we're going to return to the Routine with Introduction of Bills.

Introduction of Bills

(continued)

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

Bill 3

Credit Union Amendment Act, 2009

Mr. Berger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce the Credit Union Amendment Act, 2009.

This legislation modernizes voting rules for credit unions by allowing members to vote for directors in advance of their annual general meeting. The amendment also makes minor administrative

change that would give credit unions more flexibility in reporting requirements of credit union committees to their board.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 3 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 3 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

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

Bill 4

Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2009

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce and move Bill 4, the Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2009.

Two amendments are being proposed. The first amendment ensures further consistency with the roles and mandates policy framework for publicly funded postsecondary institutions. The second amendment is a housekeeping matter relating to clarifying designation powers for graduate faculty councils and faculty councils. The proposed amendments will allow baccalaureate and applied studies institutions to have the option of applying for the use of the term "university" in their names. They will also ensure further clarity around the governance of colleges offering degree programs.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 4 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 4 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Bill 5

Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2009

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to request leave to introduce the Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2009, the so-named Bill 5.

This act will amend the Marketing of Agricultural Products Act. No substantial changes have been made to the act since 1987. The proposed legislation will update the act, simplify wording, eliminate duplication, and make minor amendments to clarify regulatory powers, including moving the review and appeal process into regulation. The proposed amendments are the result of a review of the existing legislation and extensive industry consultation and will reduce the regulatory burden on producers and make the legislation easier to understand and use.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 5 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that Bill 5 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

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

**Bill 6
Protection of Children Abusing Drugs
Amendment Act, 2009**

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and introduce first reading of Bill 6, the Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Amendment Act, 2009.

A number of amendments to this legislation are proposed to address issues identified during the program's implementation and subsequent operation. Feedback from parents, guardians, treatment program staff, police, and others indicates that the proposed amendments will enable the program to better support children and families. The amendments include increasing the length of the confinement period from five days to 10 days for the purpose of expanding support services, enhancing the involvement of parents and guardians, addressing pressure on police transportation services, strengthening the review process, and allowing for the extension of a court order by an additional five days.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 6 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that Bill 6 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

**Bill 7
Public Health Amendment Act, 2009**

Mr. Liepert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today and introduce first reading of Bill 7, the Public Health Amendment Act, 2009.

This legislation supports the implementation of a new model for public health in the province, and the amendments include clarifying the role of the chief medical officer of health; transferring regulation-making authority for routine public health standards, guidelines, and rules to the Minister of Health and Wellness; and providing for better communication with parents and their school-aged children about public health programs.

It is my pleasure today to move first reading of Bill 7.

[Motion carried; Bill 7 read a first time]

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

**Bill 8
Feeder Associations Guarantee Act**

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 8, the Feeder Associations Guarantee Act. 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.

Like the previous legislation the new act supports the growth and development of feeder associations. The new act will allow government to better meet the needs of the livestock feeding and marketing value chain, and it is the result of a review of the existing legislation and stakeholder consultations.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 8 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

**2:50 Bill 9
Government Organization Amendment Act, 2009**

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to request leave to introduce Bill 9, the Government Organization Amendment Act, 2009, schedule 12.

This bill will enhance the governance of the registry agents network and increase accountability and service delivery. This will be accomplished by clarifying accountabilities and consequences for registry agents, formalizing a process for audits and inspections, and providing regulation-making authority for further regulations to be developed.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 9 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that Bill 9 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

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

**Bill 10
Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act**

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 10, the Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act.

The new act recognizes and reflects the changing needs of Albertans who want to live as independently as possible while they continue to have access to the accommodations and services they need. The proposed legislation gives government the renewed authority to monitor for compliance to the accommodation standards and investigate complaints from residents, their families, or the general public. This act also clarifies what a supportive living setting is and when an operator requires a licence to operate such a facility. The Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act gives residents the opportunity to age in the right place, to stay in their communities, close to their family and friends, their best support system.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 10 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that Bill 10 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

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

Bill 11

Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2009

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to request leave to introduce Bill 11, the Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2009, for first reading.

These amendments will introduce creative sentencing options to deter actions that damage the province's fisheries. Through these amendments Albertans will continue to see high-quality fishing opportunities.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 11 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that Bill 11 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

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

Bill 12

Surface Rights Amendment Act, 2009

Mr. Berger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 12, the proposed Surface Rights Amendment Act, 2009.

I'm bringing the act forward on behalf of my colleague the hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. This legislation will help the Surface Rights Board improve service to Albertans by simplifying its processes. This will enable the board to implement more informal and flexible forms of dispute resolution and allow the board to better manage its workload. The proposed amendments are entirely procedural and do not address other matters such as compensation.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 12 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that Bill 12 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

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

Bill 13

Justice of the Peace Amendment Act, 2009

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to request leave to introduce Bill 13, the Justice of the Peace Amendment Act, 2009.

The bill will allow a justice of the peace to sit past the age of 70 up to a maximum of 75 or until his or her appointment expires. Currently justices of the peace are appointed for a term of 10 years but cannot sit past age 70 even if their appointment has not expired.

The proposed legislation is consistent with provisions in the Provincial Court Act applicable to judges and provisions being introduced to the Court of Queen's Bench Act applicable to masters in chambers.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 13 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

Mr. Groeneveld: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased today to table responses to questions raised during debate of supplementary estimates on November 26, 2008.

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a number of tablings today, one series from a Dorene Rew lamenting Alberta taxpayers being hung on the hook for pay to ousted health executives; another from a Mr. Ali Amini relating the dissatisfaction with the way officials and licensing bodies are treating foreign-trained physicians; another on the revamp of the seniors' drug program from a J. Faminoff; and another set of tablings from Allan and Rose Marie Dahlen, again relating to the seniors' drug legislation.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of two news releases which relate to my questions today. One is from Millar Western Forest Products, dated February 10, announcing the layoff of 138 workers. The other is from Grande Cache Coal Corporation with today's date, announcing that 100 workers have been laid off.

My second tabling is the appropriate number of copies of six reports from long-term care workers indicating specific instances of shifts that were short-staffed. One of these workers reports that in spite of taking only two five-minute breaks, there was still not enough time to get all the residents out of bed for breakfast and lunch.

Thank you.

The Speaker: I have three tablings today. Pursuant to section 39(3) of the Legislative Assembly Act the chair wishes to table with the Assembly five copies of the following Members' Services orders: Members' Services Committee order 1/09, Executive Council salaries, No. 4, which came into force on February 4; Members' Services Committee order 2/09, members' allowances amendment order, which came into force on February 4; Members' Services Committee order 3/09, members' committee allowances amendment order, which came into force on February 4; Members' Services Committee order 4/09, members' allowances amendment order, which will come into force on April 1; and Members' Services Committee order 5/09, constituency services amendment order, which will come into force on April 1. All of those either have come into effect or will come into effect in the year 2009.

The chair is also pleased to table five copies of a brochure produced by the Legislative Assembly of Alberta entitled Page Biographies, Legislative Assembly of Alberta, 27th Legislature, Second Session, Spring 2009. This outlines the current and new pages that we have.

Pursuant to section 4(2) of the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act the chair is pleased to table with the Assembly

the annual report of the Chief Electoral Officer for the calendar year 2007. The report includes the office's financial statements as at March 31, 2008.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Hancock, Minister of Education, school jurisdictions' audited financial statements for the year ended August 31, 2007, sections 1, 2, and 3.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Goudreau, Minister of Employment and Immigration, pursuant to the Regulated Accounting Profession Act the Certified Management Accountants of Alberta 2008 annual report; pursuant to the Veterinary Profession Act the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association 2008 annual report; pursuant to the Land Surveyors Act the Alberta Land Surveyors' Association report of proceedings of the 99th annual general meeting.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Danyluk, Minister of Municipal Affairs, a letter dated January 6, 2009, from the hon. Mr. Danyluk, Minister of Municipal Affairs, to Ms Pastoor, the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, responding to questions raised during debate on Bill 51, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act (No. 2), regarding the tank site remediation program.

On behalf of the hon. Ms Evans, Minister of Finance and Enterprise, pursuant to the provincial judges and masters in chambers registered and unregistered pension plans regulation the provincial judges and masters in chambers registered and unregistered pension plans annual report for the year ended March 31, 2008.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 7(7) now kicks in.

3:00

Orders of the Day

Government Motions

Committee Membership Changes

2. Mr. Zwozdesky moved on behalf of Mr. Hancock:

Be it resolved that the following changes to the following standing committees be approved.

 - (a) Special Standing Committee on Members' Services: that Mr. Fawcett replace Mr. Rodney, that Mr. Rogers replace Mr. Snelgrove;
 - (b) Standing Committee on Private Bills: that Mr. Bhardwaj replace Mr. Xiao, that Mr. Rodney replace Mr. Fawcett, that Dr. Taft replace Dr. Swann;
 - (c) Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing: that Mr. Mitzel replace Mr. Bhardwaj;
 - (d) Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund: that Mr. Campbell replace Mr. Olson;
 - (e) Standing Committee on Public Accounts: that Mr. Quest replace Mr. Griffiths as deputy chair, that Mr. Olson replace Mr. Griffiths;
 - (f) Standing Committee on Community Services: that Mr. Doerksen replace Mr. Rodney as chair;
 - (g) Standing Committee on the Economy: that Mr. Campbell replace Mr. Allred as chair, that Dr. Taft replace Ms Blakeman;
 - (h) Standing Committee on Resources and Environment: that Ms Blakeman replace Dr. Swann as deputy chair;
 - (i) Standing Committee on Health: that Dr. Taft replace Dr. Swann.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this is a debatable motion. I have a question for the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. Yesterday I received from the hon. member and the hon. member's colleague two letters indicating they wanted to resign from committees. As I understand it, the motion now put forward by the Deputy Government House Leader does not contain those two changes. Now, a letter was sent from my office and conveyed to the Government House Leader with respect to that. I understand as well, though, that this motion was already on the Order Paper. So there's a question of either having to deal with this matter now or of coming back to it another day. An additional motion would have to be made. Right now we just have the one in front of us.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I'm sorry. I have not yet received a copy of those particular letters, but with the concurrence of the House we could certainly bring this back at a later time.

The Speaker: That is a possibility. Do you want to proceed with the current motion as it is now and bring the subsequent matter back later?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Yes, please.

The Speaker: The motion in front of us is debatable. No participants, then? Okay.

[Government Motion 2 carried]

The Speaker: Before we move on, might we just interrupt the ordinary routine to revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

The Speaker: Hon. Deputy Speaker, you sent me a note that you have guests.

Mr. Cao: Yes, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise and introduce to you and through you to this Assembly the three representatives of TUXIS Parliament of Alberta who are visiting the Legislature today. The TUXIS Parliament is a nonprofit youth parliament open to Alberta youth between the ages of 15 and 21. It provides youth with an opportunity to improve public speaking ability, to become capable leaders, and to learn about the workings of parliamentary procedure. Natasha Soles and Kelsey Earle are currently members of the group, and Benjamyn McKay is a member of the alumni society. Now, I was wondering which gallery they were sitting in. I would like to ask the Assembly to give them a traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: Leader of the Official Opposition, you have some very special guests.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you to the House I want to introduce my mother, my sister, and two cousins who are here today to see my inaugural speech: my mother, Margaret Swann, a graduate of McKay Avenue school in the early days in Edmonton – she lives in Calgary now with most of my family – Susan Saracini, a sister, who lives in Calgary; Gary and Loris Webb, Edmontonians and supporters. I would ask them to stand up, and we'll give them a warm traditional welcome to the Legislature.

Consideration of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech

Mr. Johnston 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.

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

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to move acceptance of the Speech from the Throne, and it is an honour to do it on behalf of the constituents of Calgary-Hays. I know my constituents will be very pleased with the direction our government is taking. For the fifth year in a row His Honour the Lieutenant Governor delivered the Speech from the Throne with eloquence and style. His words were not only touching but inspired us. His Honour showed us a picture of the Alberta that we all want to achieve and be a part of.

In the speech we saw an Alberta that is dedicated to building local, national, and international relationships, driving its innovation to higher levels, and leading in environmental management. We also saw a province that will continue to take care of its most vulnerable, a province that supports its communities, strengthens its education system, and leads an efficient and effective health care system. This is an Alberta that I'm pleased to be part of. The Speech from the Throne provided us with a map of how we will achieve this Alberta over the months to come.

But, Mr. Speaker, the speech struck me because it showed us how we are going to excel during these uncertain times. If we follow the plan set out in the Speech from the Throne, we can triumph over any possible barriers ahead. It is apparent that only Albertans can look at today's economic uncertainty and see the path to prosperity. Looking back to remember all the steps we took to ensure a stronger today is a good reminder that it takes a solid plan and discipline to secure a safe tomorrow.

Indeed, with a long-term plan as was outlined in the Speech from the Throne, anything is possible. If we are dedicated enough, we can not only get through anything, but we can shine as we come out of it. If there is anyone who is going to overcome the challenges ahead of us, it is Alberta. That is the essence of what it is to be Albertan. Not only do we work hard to meet our goals, attain greatness, and enhance our lifestyles, but we go above and beyond to achieve more than is expected from us. We create opportunities out of adversity.

Eliminating the deficit was no easy feat. We all had to make sacrifices, but we knew why we were doing it. We stuck to it, and we achieved our goal and are better off for it. Today we sit a little more comfortably because of the sacrifices we made in the past. We are one step ahead of the game. Now we can continue to save for the future and cut taxes like the health care premium to make a little more room in our wallets.

We know that every penny counts, so our government will continue to be efficient with taxpayer dollars. Funds will be used responsibly to reach as many Albertans who need it. Albertans can continue to count on receiving value for their hard-earned money. It is because of careful planning that we are able to head into the times ahead with a positive outlook. We have a strong foundation that is going to ease us through the months to come. Albertans can breathe a little easier because of their government's prudence and foresight.

Because of the fiscal discipline that permeates all decisions that this government makes, we are able to develop new technology, enhance the security of all Albertans, and continue to take care of those who need it most. These are the things that matter to Albertans. We will continue to plan for the future by investing in our people, our infrastructure, and our innovative technologies so that we can continue our tradition of being a leader. This government knows where Alberta's strengths are. The Speech from the Throne showed us that these strengths will increase as we continue to work on them and improve them. We will continue to aim for perfection in our leading industries. We will continue to focus on innovation in the energy sector, technology, and on our most valuable resource, our people.

3:10

Through new initiatives like Inspiring Education, which I am looking forward to bringing back to my constituency, we will make Alberta's education system as accessible and inviting as possible. All students will be able to flourish and find their passion. Once young Albertans have grown through the first level of their education, they will be able to look forward to the next step. Our outstanding postsecondary institutions, honed by Campus Alberta, will specialize their skills so that they can be among the most competitive in the world. The future looks bright.

We know that the way to become the best is to focus on our strengths, so Albertans have worked to develop our natural resources responsibly, and for that reason we are world renowned. We have earned the status of a safe and secure producer of energy. We will continue to profit from that place in the world. We will compete in the global market for our place. We will promote our products and their advantages through the relationships that our government has been building. We will grow and break down any barriers. As a result, our careers will continue to prosper.

We were blessed with natural resources, but what separates us from the rest is how we work with them. Alberta develops partnerships to grow expertise in the energy sector. This has allowed us to develop our resources and meet the global demand for energy. Through the partnerships we have created, we can be confident that our resources are being extracted with state-of-the-art methods and in the most environmentally conscious way.

Our resources and innovations will continue to be competitive around the world as our government will pursue the promotion of our goods. Continuing to build on our successes and innovation will help us continue our strong standing on the global stage. The relationships we build with our resource partners on the international market will ensure that our economy continues to prosper. The world has already started to learn about our environmental focus and leadership. Our innovation is showing the world how it is possible to have clean water, air, and land while supplying the world with forestry, agriculture, and energy commodities.

As has been laid out in yesterday's speech, the government of Alberta will continue to work to maintain the high quality way of life we enjoy as Albertans. Programs and services will continue to be among the best available. Our highest standard will be upheld. Thanks to the past investments we have made in infrastructure, we can now rest assured that the ones we love are receiving the best care in our world-class hospitals. I recently experienced our hospitals first-hand when I spent the day at the Peter Lougheed hospital as a patient. I was very impressed with the level of care I received from all of the providers involved. Calgary-Hays is looking forward to being home to the new south hospital, a ring road, and already we have new schools being built. These investments are vital and truly enhance our quality of life.

Mr. Speaker, we have the tools and resources, but it is the spirit of Alberta that has made the most of them. It is our people who have brought our province to a level of excellence. We will continue to attract the best people to come work and live in Alberta to sustain our growth and drive our development. No matter what the future holds, it is our people who will make the difference. It is our initiative that will sustain us.

Our continued dedication to enhancing the quality of life of Albertans is put into action in Bill 1, the Employment Standards (Reservist Leave) Amendment Act, 2009. Bill 1 will protect those who protect us. Many Albertans leave their friends and family behind to serve their country. Some of these people are soldiers by career. They are employed by the Canadian Forces on a full-time basis. However, there are soldiers who have regular civilian jobs and volunteer with the Canadian Forces on a part-time basis. These reservists are only called upon when the Canadian Forces are in need of help.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta is proud to be home to 25,000 reservists, who at times have had to leave their family and their careers to assist the Canadian Forces. Reservists expand, sustain, and support Canada's forces in times of need. They play a vital role in operations abroad and in emergency situations within Canada. Locally, reservists have been called upon in Alberta to help extinguish our forest fires, and they were able to supplement our forces and give them relief. They must be given the flexibility to leave work in these sorts of challenging situations.

As the Canadian Forces mission to Afghanistan has been extended, more and more reservists are required. Reservists are needed to create stability and peace in countries which face turmoil. These brave men and women build much-needed infrastructure, protect innocent civilians from extremists, and help build strong relationships to ensure that diplomatic progress is maintained. While they leave Alberta to achieve this, there have been occasions when reservists have come back to Canada only to find that their jobs are no longer there, that they have been filled by someone else. Needless to say, this is a disheartening reality.

Bill 1 will change that situation. The legislation will ensure that service to one's country and bravery are rewarded. Those who dedicate themselves to peace should not have to choose between a career and serving our country. We should encourage them in any way possible.

The legislation will make sure that the transition from a conflict zone to Alberta is as smooth as possible. Bill 1 will amend the Employment Standards Code to establish unpaid job protection leave for the reservists who take part in military activities and operations. When reservists have shown their dedication to a job by spending 26 consecutive weeks with an employer, they will be able to take a protected leave. They will be able to pick up where they left off, and they will be able to continue achieving their career goals. They won't have to worry about career growth and paths when they are considering whether or not to volunteer to be a reservist.

According to the Canadian Forces there are currently over 400 primary reserves personnel serving on peacekeeping and humanitarian missions. These people are crucial to the proper functioning of the Canadian Forces operations. Bill 1 will help the Canadian Forces maintain the reputation of having the best and brightest soldiers and will allow soldiers to get the proper training they need to face difficult situations.

While reservists usually train during their time off work, on weekends and on holidays, they also need two weeks of full-time service a year to keep their qualifications current. Bill 1 will allow this to happen much easier. Whether they get deployed to a Canadian Forces operation abroad, help with an emergency in

Canada, or take part in crucial training, their jobs will be here for them when they get back to Alberta. Therefore, if reservists leave their family, they can rest assured that when they come back from the call of duty, they will be able to provide for their loved ones in the same way they once did. Job security is not a burden that reservists should have to bear on their shoulders when they are in the service of their country.

Further, Bill 1 will help reservists get back to their home lives a little easier. They will simply be able to continue in a job that they are good at and comfortable in. This will help provide some sense of continuity for reservists and their families. As a former soldier I realize how important it is to have reservists to augment the Canadian Forces numbers. They allow our military to successfully complete their missions.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the Premier for bringing this legislation forward. I know that Bill 1 will make a world of difference in the lives of reservists and their loved ones. Bill 1 makes it possible to balance life and duty. I am honoured to be part of a government that is so focused on the needs of its people. Our dedication to fiscal prudence and growth development will serve us well. Based on the Speech from the Throne, it is clear that all aspects of our economy and our lives have been considered to make sure that Albertans' lives are as seamless as possible during this time of uncertainty. Albertans can look forward to a healthy, happy, and prosperous future thanks to the strong leadership of our government, and I look forward to the days ahead and the accomplishments to come.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is truly an honour and a privilege to rise in the House today to second the motion to accept the Speech from the Throne. It's hard to believe that almost an entire year has passed since I sat in this House to give my first throne speech as a Member of this Legislative Assembly. I felt tremendously honoured to be elected by the constituents of Drayton Valley-Calmar as part of one of the strongest governments this province has ever seen, and every day I continue to be very proud to serve my constituents.

Again I felt privileged when I was asked to take on the role of parliamentary assistant for Environment. I can tell you that I am enjoying this role very much, working with the exceptional team headed by the hon. Minister of Environment. It is indeed a pleasure to work on the environmental issues and challenges facing Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier inviting me to second the Speech from the Throne is among those great honours. I stand here today very proud to represent my constituents and my province. Reminiscing about this time last year reminds me of the excitement I felt in anticipation of what was to come and the challenge I would face as a new MLA. In many ways this new session is no different. I still look forward to what is to come.

As we all know, there have been significant changes in the past year, bringing along with them new and unique challenges. With all of the challenges in the global economic climate we as Albertans, Canadians, and global citizens will experience new pressures. Our government is aware of this and is harnessing its innovative skills and thinking ahead and is finding solutions. Mr. Speaker, my cup is always half full. That is how I tackle challenges, by thoughtfully considering what we need to do but also exploring what opportunities exist in meeting our challenges. It is important to ensure that the decisions we make today will indeed consider the impacts on the future as well.

3:20

In light of these changes and challenges we face, the Alberta government has created a plan to protect Albertans and what matters most to them. In the 2008 budget the hon. minister of finance announced that health care premiums would be eliminated for all Albertans, and as of January 1, 2009, we carried through on this promise. This tax change is just one example of measures taken by our government to stimulate the economy, saving Albertans and businesses alike over \$1 billion annually. Our government was taking measures like this long before the economic downturn began to prepare us for when times are tougher.

As we heard yesterday in the Speech from the Throne, the government's plan is inclusive of all Albertans. It is clear that Alberta's unique qualities are protected, our resources are valued, and most importantly, that our people, from our youngest to our eldest, are cared for. For our youngest and families the throne speech reiterated a goal of 14,000 new child care spaces by the year 2011, and the province is well on its way. My own community of Drayton Valley has taken part in this initiative through the development of an early childhood development centre. This is an excellent example of how communities work to meet the needs of children and families in collaboration with the province. It was a privilege to have the hon. Premier, Mrs. Stelmach, and the hon. Minister of Children and Youth Services attend the grand opening of the centre. I know that the children and families present were thrilled to have them in attendance on that very special day.

Our commitment to Alberta's youth and families continues with the Department of Education and the launch of Inspiring Education, which gives Albertans the unique opportunity to shape the future of education in our province. Now is the time for Albertans of all ages to express their vision for the future of education in our province so that we can ensure that it indeed reflects their hopes and their dreams.

In addition to children and youth, Mr. Speaker, the throne speech also recognizes our seniors, the significant place they hold in our society and our communities and the importance of ensuring that they have the opportunity to live comfortably and to age in their place of choice. The ministers of Seniors and Community Supports and Health and Wellness recently rolled out comprehensive continuing care standards which ensure that quality services are delivered across the entire system, including home living, supportive living, and facility living.

Overall, Mr. Speaker, in continuing to pursue Alberta's continuing care strategy, the government is working to ensure that seniors have a strong voice in planning their future, enabling them to preserve their independence and quality of life. Having this choice is so important for our seniors in all geographical areas of our province. As a rural MLA it is extremely important for me to have those choices available to my seniors in Drayton Valley-Calmar and throughout the province. I know that as we make decisions affecting our seniors, I keep my mom, 87 years young, who is living in continuing care, and all seniors in my constituency close to mind. They and others like them have helped mould our province into the wonderful place it is today. It is our duty to ensure that we make our decisions with this mind, to be forever grateful for what they have done and continue to do today to build our communities and our province.

In ensuring quality and service for our youngest to our eldest, the throne speech delivers with a focused commitment to advanced education. Albertans will have the opportunity to pursue their learning and career goals through Campus Alberta, a vision encompassing all of our province's postsecondary institutions, ultimately

providing Albertans with lifelong learning opportunities. Through this framework Albertans can pursue their career goals within the province. In my constituency an educational consortium helps to deliver these educational opportunities. This ensures that my constituents can receive their education in the location of their choice. Many of my constituents are happy to remain at home in rural Alberta, and the consortium allows them to do this.

Investments in education will keep Alberta on the cutting edge of science and ingenuity, increasing our intellectual capital and driving our business sector. Mr. Speaker, we heard in the throne speech that there is a plan to protect our business sector as well. An example of a measure already undertaken by our government to boost Alberta's economy is the trade, investment, and labour mobility agreement. This agreement eliminates trade barriers between Alberta and British Columbia, allowing for nearly seamless access to labour, transportation, and energy between the two provinces.

This government is dedicated to maintaining strong ties with our biggest trading partner, the United States, as our province and our country welcomes the new administration, but it will be very important for us to continue to broaden the number of trading partners we have. This government will work hard to ensure that open communication and support mutually benefit business deals with all of our trading partners.

In the marketing of Alberta's energy the government has developed a plan to ensure responsible and sustainable prosperity for the province's future. The provincial energy strategy works towards the goal of providing energy while at the same time minimizing the impact on the environment. In addition to harnessing technology, the development of renewable energy, the strategy encourages the responsible and prudent use of current energy sources. Further, this government is working to reduce the impact of current emissions through the announcement of a \$2 billion investment in carbon capture and storage.

With these initiatives Alberta is demonstrating an ardent commitment to protecting our energy and the environment, two of our greatest assets. Mr. Speaker, the pristine beauty of our environment and landscapes are legendary. The commitments made in relation to the energy sector are complemented by initiatives to further protect our environment. The newly developed land-use framework will help to ensure that the uniqueness of Alberta's many different ecosystems is preserved. A renewed water for life strategy will make certain that we are conscious of our water as a resource and that we have a plan to protect it in the long term.

The Speech from the Throne also addressed Alberta's parks, promising the release of a new plan that will ensure the sustainability of these areas, enhance recreational opportunities, and continue to attract many individuals to our province both as tourists and as residents.

Mr. Speaker, our communities are vibrant and are continually becoming stronger and more secure. Recent initiatives such as the enactment of the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act demonstrates this government's commitment to community safety.

We also believe that it is extremely important to continue to invest in infrastructure throughout our province to position us well once we emerge from this economic downturn. It is our belief that an important part of our continued economic success will be intimately tied to our investments in our province's infrastructure. Not only does this create jobs at a time when it is incredibly important, but it also improves the quality of life of all Albertans.

Many other jurisdictions in Canada and, indeed, around the world are going into massive deficits in order to finance their projects. However, Alberta is ahead of the curve and has allocated more than \$6 billion as part of the capital account. These investments will

improve our hospitals, schools, and other public infrastructure to help address the needs of our province as we meet the challenges of a booming, growing, and changing population, ultimately encouraging individuals to stay in Alberta. We recognize the unique challenges the economy places on our infrastructure growth plans, and as such we will ensure that funds disbursed are delivered efficiently and in an effective manner, providing the best dollar value for Albertans. Taking care of our infrastructure will ensure that we are ready for the opportunities that the future will bring.

Yesterday, Mr. Speaker, when I heard the hon. Lieutenant Governor say that tough times bring out the best in Albertans because we pull together through adversity and emerge with strength, it struck me on such a personal level as I was deeply touched by these words. My own community's motto is Pulling Together, and it drives our sense of community. Our businesses, volunteer groups, and associations enrich my region's quality of life based on this very motto. It has seen us through thick and thin. Not only is pulling together what Albertans do, but it is clear that this government will help provide the structure and opportunity for us to do just that. It is the people that make the area so rich. Their can-do attitude is what makes my constituency such a wonderful place to live, work, and raise a family.

With Bill 1 we as Albertans can continue to show our support to the reservists who make great sacrifices to protect our freedoms by supporting them through job security while they are on leave.

3:30

Mr. Speaker, I saw all Albertans reflected yesterday in the throne speech, from our youngest to our eldest to our volunteers, from the businessman to the developer, from the oil sands in the north to our beautiful parks, the importance of our agriculture and forestry industries, and our emerging bioeconomy.

This government has a plan that will keep Alberta in its leadership role despite the global economic climate. It's true that we're not immune, but we are still very fortunate. We will continue to do what we have always done: we will adapt to the realities of our situation, set goals for the future, and move forward in pursuing these goals. Our priority, as always, is to protect Albertans and what matters to them most. As the hon. Lieutenant Governor said yesterday, we remain committed to core programs that Albertans value deeply, such as health and education.

Albertans are not immune to the financial situation around the world, and we understand that Albertans are worried about their futures. We have made a promise to protect Albertans in these tough times, a promise we will keep. We are debt free, and we have over \$7 billion set aside in the sustainability fund to help protect our core programs. We have low unemployment and low income and corporate taxes.

The strong fiscal management we have shown and the difficult decisions made in the past have positioned Alberta well. This has not happened by mistake, Mr. Speaker. It is because of great leadership that ensured that money was set aside in good times to be there when Albertans need it. I for one as a new MLA am grateful to the leaders who had the vision to pay down our debt and to put these savings funds in place.

Our decisions may still be tough, but they will be made easier because of the vision for the future. Mr. Speaker, our plan is a holistic, comprehensive approach for Alberta and includes measures to protect what matters to Albertans. With an ardent commitment to protecting our environment, we will successfully market Alberta's energy to an environmentally conscious world, and we will ensure that our forestry and agricultural industries continue to be supported and valued and that new and emerging opportunities in value-added and bioeconomies will be supported.

By providing Albertans with quality service and opportunities from childhood through to retirement, not only are we securing a high quality of life for current Albertans, but we are attracting many new ones who, too, are so called and will be so proud to call Alberta home.

Overall this plan allows Albertans to face our future with a great deal of confidence. It gives us hope, opportunity, and a vision of where Alberta and Albertans are headed. It embraces the many opportunities our great province has to offer, and it speaks to and is grateful for all Albertans' pulling together to make this the best place in the world to live, work, play, retire, and educate and raise our families. There is no place in the world like Alberta, and it is because of the wonderful spirit and the can-do attitude of Albertans.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank His Honour the Lieutenant Governor for the confidence and certainty in his delivery of the Speech from the Throne and in the manner in which he serves our province.

Thank you.

The Speaker: As I call on the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition, the hon. leader under our rules has up to 90 minutes to participate. At the conclusion there is an offering of a five-minute question-and-answer response.

It's my great pleasure to introduce the new leader of Her Majesty's Official Opposition in the province of Alberta. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today in the House to respond to the Speech from the Throne as Leader of the Official Opposition and an immensely proud, lifelong Albertan. My privilege and duty today is to challenge the government's flawed premises and outdated assumptions as outlined in yesterday's Speech from the Throne.

With no disrespect I offer an alternative vision of our future, a future of a great province with unparalleled opportunity and potential. I acknowledge good ideas within the speech, but it fails to answer the questions most Albertans are asking. Where are we going? What is the long-term vision to a better and a different future, a future that even now is being written by profound economic, environmental, and social realities, a future that we must step forward to guide or be left behind as other civilizations have been? Other societies have anticipated this future. They have already seen the dangers and the opportunities, and they are taking action now. Several European nations over the past 15 years have wisely chosen to develop their resources more carefully, to save more prudently, and to determine environmental limits and live within them, and they are living well.

Change is possible. Change can work even for Alberta. Albertans know that we need a change, that the treadmill of boom and bust and dependence on a single unsustainable industry is getting us nowhere fast. We're running in place, burning energy without moving forward, when we should be conserving and reusing renewable forms of energy and exporting our product to the rest of the world. We need to get off the treadmill and start running in the real world, charting our own course, one based on a sustainable energy policy, a diverse economy, and finding a new pride and hope in leading the way.

Albertans are sophisticated, educated above the average in Canada. They want a more thoughtful approach to government based on good science, including the new science of systems, sustainability, and careful planning that includes the long-term future of our children and their children. Albertans are discouraged not by the excellent science in Alberta but by the lack of careful analysis of

options and the corresponding lack of openness to new ideas that have come to characterize this government. Our approach to energy, the environment, health care, and education must begin with an end goal in sight. For me, that goal is simple. Begin with health as the fundamental principle on which we build all of our systems: healthy persons in healthy relationships in healthy communities in healthy environments.

The primary purpose of government must be to serve the long-term public interests. This cannot be defined merely as gross domestic product or jobs alone. We are failing growing numbers of Albertans who are not reaping the rewards of Alberta's promise: the young mother in my neighbourhood in a coffee shop that works two jobs to earn enough to take care of her children; the young engineer working for a local oil company who wants to be proud of his work but feels he cannot; an elderly woman, a personal friend, who feels abandoned because of her complex health needs and now avoids the health care system until an emergency happens; the mother of a mentally disabled boy who presented her story on the steps of the Legislature last fall about her continuing battle – eight years, in fact – for decent care for her son; and the ranchers in the southwest slopes who believe they've lost their basic rights as owners to influence development decisions affecting not only their livelihoods but their groundwater and their landscapes for the future. We need to keep Alberta's promise for all these people and so many others. The promise is so demanding, yet it is possible if we manage well, if we manage differently.

It has become very clear, however, that our society cannot fulfill Alberta's promise without a dramatic turnaround, a fundamental change of course, a new way of looking at our purpose as government, that includes engaging people as citizens to co-create the conditions for healthy people in healthy communities. The government's throne speech reveals no such turnaround. It is a prescription for more of the same: a dependence upon resource extraction at breakneck speed, an education system too focused on training for that sector, a reactive health care system that treats people after they break down, and social supports that fail to respect both the workers and the citizens trying to get help. Most troubling of all is the lack of substantial commitment to cherishing, protecting, and restoring our environment: the land, the water, the air that sustain our lives and our very business opportunities.

Albertans from all over this province from every walk of life are telling me they are losing trust in the ability or the willingness of their politicians to do their job, to understand and defend and enhance the public interests long term. Albertans want politicians to take the mantle of leadership very seriously. They want leaders who will ask tough questions of themselves, leaders who are capable of flexibility, co-operation, and imagination. They want leaders who will listen to citizens not just for politeness' sake but because their voices actually influence public policy. Albertans want leaders who do the hard work of measuring progress with the best scientific tools available and who are willing to change course when the evidence demands it. Examples include our growing mental health problems, our lack of savings in this province over the last 15 years, our unmanaged oil sands development.

3:40

These are extremely challenging times. I don't minimize this. They demand honesty and transparency about what government policies are working and what are not and our willingness to redress those. We must speak frankly and respectfully of what we've learned or failed to learn from the past and how government must do things differently to protect future generations and ensure our continued prosperity.

It's now even more urgent that we rise above partisan differences and seek the public good in our debates and our committee work. I commend the Premier's decision to form all-party committees in the last two years. We know they can do good work. Now let us ensure they address the most compelling and vital issues of our day, making the best public policy possible.

Public trust is at an all-time low, as illustrated in the last provincial election. With it, public participation has been reduced because of the loss of a sense of responsibility. We all must take responsibility for that. This is not rocket science. When people do not feel they have influence, they get depressed, and they give up. That's what, I'm afraid, I see today.

We can rebuild trust in the political process by being open about what we think and being open to new ideas. We can build trust through talking frankly about what we've learned and how we will do things differently to protect future generations. Perhaps most fundamentally, we could build trust by walking the talk. As many of our mothers taught us, say what you mean, mean what you say, and follow through.

For many decades now Albertans have had it pretty good. Our vast oil and gas wealth have allowed us to build remarkable programs and infrastructure. Really, these are world class. I would not deny that. We have strong programs in science and technology, including the emerging field of nanotechnology. We can be proud of groundbreaking medical innovation. I commend the government for increasing the number of medical graduates in the last few years. We have a world-class arts and culture sector. We have a good life here, and much of it is owed to the wealth we have created through the oil and gas sector. But it would be unwise to assume that we can continue to depend on an industry, one industry, to keep Alberta prosperous forever. We need to prepare for a healthier, more diverse legacy for tomorrow's children, an Alberta in which a bust in the oil and gas sector does not lead inevitably to recession in the province. We could be so much more than the world's gas station.

The Easter Islanders of history, the Mayans, the Romans are among civilizations that self-destructed because of lack of vision, loss of honest, critical thinking, and environmental overreach. Ronald Wright describes these problems in his thoughtful, eloquent little book *A Short History of Progress*.

I quote Ronald Wright. Things are moving so fast that inaction itself is one of the biggest mistakes. The 10,000-year human experiment of the settled life will stand or fall by what we do and don't do now. The reform that is needed is not anti-capitalist; it's not anti-American; it's not even deep environmentalist. It is simply the transition from short-term thinking to long-term thinking, from recklessness and excess to moderation and a precautionary principle.

I continue the quote. The great advantage we have, our best chance for avoiding the fate of past societies, is that we know about these past societies. We can see how and why they went wrong. Homo sapiens has the information to know itself for what it is, an ice age hunter only half-evolved towards intelligence, clever but seldom wise. We are now at the stage when the Easter Islanders could still have halted the senseless cutting of their last trees and the failure to plant the seeds out of reach of rats. We have the tools and the means to share resources, clean up pollution, dispense basic health care and birth control, and set economic limits in line with natural limits. If we don't do these now, we may prosper, but we will never be able to do them when times get hard. Our fate will twist out of our hands. And this new century will not grow very old before we enter an age of chaos and collapse that will dwarf the dark ages of the past. Now is our last chance to get the future right. End of quote.

While trees were the engine of development on Easter Island, a resource that their civilization exhausted through shortsightedness

to its demise, our island, if I can put it that way, called Alberta has oil as its engine of development. But for how long? At least the trees were renewable. Oil and gas clearly are not. How much greater our responsibility to lead on the single greatest threat to health and the economy on the planet: climate change.

My response to the Speech from the Throne is directed at fellow members in this House and to all Albertans. I'm very aware that we have many caring, bright, and competent people on all sides of the House. Today I'm asking all of us and all Albertans outside these walls to let go of our defensiveness over the change we need to make and consider the options for our province, our people, our future.

Many Albertans believe there's nothing wrong, that the status quo is good enough. I do not and cannot accept this judgment. Consider the realities that we face. The oil cannot last forever. We know that. Our present approach to fossil fuel development is not serving progressively the long-term interests of people and the environment. It's not even serving industry. We have failed them in terms of their international reputation and the way we've allowed it to develop.

We know the industry is a cyclic industry. When public programs depend so heavily on oil and gas revenue, they become vulnerable with every downturn in the industry. Our schools and hospitals, roads and water treatment plants, our care for seniors and Albertans with disabilities: all of these fundamental elements of society are threatened because we have for too long depended on one industry, oil and gas, to pay the lion's share of our bills. And now, at a time of economic decline and a war on carbon, we are hurting our number one industry, losing reputation and international markets. In some respects we have not treated that industry fairly, just as we have not been fair to future generations. We need to help all Albertans, including the oil and gas sector, to see, explore, understand, and adapt to new realities.

We have spent virtually all the nonrenewable resource wealth that has come out of the ground in the last 16 years. Instead of saving and living off the interest from this wealth, as Norway has done and other oil producing countries, we've been left very vulnerable to this unguided growth. To compound this challenge, we've accumulated a huge environmental debt. Thousands of contaminated sites and well sites have not been reclaimed, some for over 50 years. Many of these will fall to the public purse to reclaim instead of being remediated by those who created the damage. This is a crime, literally. If I were leading, we would not be leaving this legacy to future generations.

3:50

If we as a people are serious about building a better Alberta for our children and theirs, then we must take responsibility for that future. We must take back our lives from the market. The task of envisioning and shaping is ours and ours alone. When did we stop believing in the future? When did we give up on a better future, on the need for change? Every parent, worker, artist, farmer, student, teacher, entrepreneur, scientist, truck driver, social worker, police officer, community organizer, and public servant: all of us are in this together. The clock is ticking, and tomorrow is rushing towards us. Will we be prepared? Will the foundations for a better tomorrow be in place? Plan we must and seriously, especially those of us who have taken it upon ourselves to lead. Every member of this Assembly has stood before Albertans and said, in effect: place your trust in me. Now we need to earn that trust. Few gifts are as precious.

Several months ago I had the privilege of having my grandsons stay overnight with us. They're aged two and three. In the middle of the night I heard one of them rustling around and realized that I'd better go and find out what was going on. I found him wandering around in a different room and carried him back to his bed. Without

a word we lay there in the dark. Suddenly his hand reached out and grabbed my face, and he spent several minutes making sure that I was the person he thought I was. After several minutes of exploring and ensuring and reassuring himself, he turned back to sleep. Without words my grandson was asking me: "Are you there for me? Will you be there for me? Are you taking care of things for my future?"

Thoughtful Albertans, including elected representatives, asked similar questions about Alberta's promise. Are we being good stewards for the future? Will future generations enjoy the opportunities we have had today? How committed are we to ending poverty and homelessness, to diversifying our economy for continuing prosperity? Will our children's children face a diminished future with fewer opportunities, less hope, less democracy, less freedom?

Without a turnaround in thinking and behaving our long-term prospects are uncertain. I would say they are dim. Please do not dismiss this as partisan, radical rhetoric. I believe this at a deep level.

My experiences here and in a number of other countries around the world over 35 years, as well as the calls of much brighter leaders than I, demand decisive, courageous leadership at this time. We must conserve and shepherd our resources better. Other jurisdictions have taken on the challenge. They are moving towards a more sustainable future, they are living within their means, and they are creating the culture and organizational infrastructure required to see and shape the future. It's time for Alberta not only to join the parade but to earn the right to lead.

I'm one of the more fortunate Albertans. Born in Taber, raised in Calgary in a secure and loving middle-class family, I had opportunities to travel, play many sports, labour on the farms of southwestern Alberta, and even spend a couple of summers in a gas plant. I studied music, took up the guitar, which I still enjoy today, and singing. I continue to marvel at the great opportunities and the great artists of Alberta. Perhaps above all I grew to love this place. I want it to be there, as you do, for our children's children: the pristine mountains, the rivers and lakes, the incredible natural capital that we have taken in some ways so far granted.

My family worked hard, valued honesty and community service. These values steered me towards my eventual career in medicine. But even as I was growing up, I couldn't help but notice that while many people in Alberta thrived, others suffered injustice and lost opportunities because of family or financial circumstances beyond their control. For these people Alberta's promise was and in some cases continues to be unfulfilled. Back then I didn't see the connection between politics and health, between politics and success, but I did begin to see how all of us as citizens are responsible for taking care of each other. My security depends on the people around me feeling secure. Health work, like politics, is really about creating the conditions for health and security individually, collectively.

In the mid-1970s I practised medicine in South Africa in mission hospitals with my future wife and partner, Laureen Ross. There I began to understand the connections between politics and health. It was a difficult, first-hand education in the politics of discrimination and exclusion. With my eyes and ears and hands I felt the impact on the black people of South Africa, their limited opportunities and, in fact, their shortened lifespans. I watched many of them, mostly children, die from preventable causes. They lacked the most basic elements of life: food, clean water, sanitation, education, and access to basic health care. That's when I learned the difference between good politics and bad politics.

I returned to Alberta deeply affected by my experience, married, and began my family in Pincher Creek, Alberta, as a family

physician. But the lessons of Africa remained. I paid close attention to how children's family experience, their education opportunities, and their environment either helped or weakened their chances for success, their chances for health, their opportunities or chances for injury or illness or addiction. Long ago I gave up blaming people for their problems. We are all responsible for each other.

Too many people are not benefiting from Alberta's promise: Albertans with disabilities, single parents, seniors on fixed incomes, homeless Albertans, Alberta's First Nations. Even middle-class families pressured by the lack of affordable child care and care for their aging parents struggle with combinations of health problems, overwork, stress, and a degrading environment. Now many of our citizens are worried about whether they'll have a job or not. Again, I'm not blaming. We are all responsible. Together let's find a way to reduce the pain.

There is still an abundance of hope and opportunity in Alberta. Perhaps the greatest lesson of my work in South Africa was that positive change is possible even when things seem hopeless. Black South Africans won their freedom and continue to move forward. Nelson Mandela continues to symbolize hope and courage to move hope to action.

A responsible government, a responsible society does not take a hands-off approach to business, to the environment, or to increasing social problems. We need a different approach, a hands-on, hands-together approach, treating each other as partners in this great new enterprise of Alberta in the 21st century, in the evolution of our society into something healthier, more compassionate, more sustainable.

I have fundamental disagreements with the Premier and his government's direction though I still respect their service. I respect their humanity. As Leader of the Official Opposition I have a duty to present an alternative vision of the future, which I share with you: we work together in the public interest, or we all go down and sacrifice future generations. The Good Book says: a people without vision perish. Perhaps historians of the future will say of this time: markets without moral guidance collapse. Surely, we are experiencing this reality today.

4:00

Albertans do not support the idea that wealth is the true measure of a life or a province. Albertans tell me they seek leadership that walks the talk, honours life, and guides the market to serve people and the planet. Yesterday's throne speech talked of a positive future without a sense of what it will take to take us there. Along with our friends to the south we need to pull together in ways we have not seen since our great-grandfathers settled here. We need to give people not more political fast food, you know: it feels good now, but you pay for it later. We need to give Albertans the hard truth that we cannot have it all. We cannot have unlimited growth and pristine environments. We cannot have genuine progress without genuine sacrifice. We cannot have the lowest taxes in the country and the best public services in the land.

People need hope; they don't need false hope. We need markets; we don't need blind faith in the markets. We need a larger goal than our gross domestic product and our bank accounts. Our fondest dream must be healthy people in healthy communities and a plan to get there. Government alone cannot deliver these. We can, if we work together, help create the best conditions for health in all of its dimensions: physical, mental, social, economic, and environmental.

As our forefathers knew too well, a vision alone without hard work, sacrifice, creativity, and a shared sense of moral purpose will not result in change. These values are alive and well in our families. I've heard them expressed in this House on all sides, and now we

have to translate that into action not only here but in our communities and in our workplaces. For example, the single mother who manages to scrimp and save and achieve her bachelor of arts in social work. After several years working on behalf of the disadvantaged, she realized that she couldn't survive on her salary and has been forced to take other work. Another example is a First Nations man who confronted his broken childhood and alcohol addiction and became not only a small businessman but ultimately the chief of his band. Two courageous farm workers injured at work without compensation who have rallied other vulnerable farm workers to demand basic standards for health, safety, and compensation. These people and so many others would gladly support a longer term vision and a plan for the future of their fellow Albertans.

Our vision includes four elements. Firstly, a statement of principle: health must be the goal. As a physician I know what good health is. It's hard to define, but I think each of us knows when we are experiencing health as a result of many, many factors. As a politician I want to work in a government that recognizes and addresses all of the factors needed to create a healthy Alberta.

As for health care, the system itself, we need to take a step back and ask: what is the system supposed to do? Health care is fundamentally a relationship, a relationship of trust based on also the best of science to provide quality of care, access to care, and reasonable benefit for the cost. Therefore, we must measure changes that we make to that system on the basis of how they affect quality, how they affect access, how they affect the cost-effectiveness. That means we must set goals. We must gather evidence, examine it carefully, and listen to the professionals who are working in the system. We must work in the trenches with the vulnerable citizens who are experiencing the system and learn from what they are saying to us. We must be prepared to make the practical changes needed to improve the quality, the access, and the affordability. Professionals and institutions are important, but equally vital are trust, openness, flexibility, and the willingness to develop solid plans with a follow-through monitoring system that makes the necessary changes.

I applaud the government's progress on increasing the health workforce by increasing the number of spaces in our postsecondary institutions, doctors and nurses and the expanding role that they've been given. We should pay more attention to the family physician and expanding nursing practice as well as public health and prevention, which can pay back \$7 for every dollar we spend in prevention. We should develop more specialized surgical centres, which deliver superior treatment with reduced costs by focusing on specific procedures.

We need stronger mental health care, especially at these times of increased stress. We need to help with issues such as homelessness, domestic violence, and depression, among the highest in the country. We must look at those indicators and see the writing on the wall. We have to change the way we are addressing the long-term health of Albertans, and we must remember the old wisdom: better to spend wisely on prevention than to pour dollars into expensive cures after the fact.

Our second principle has to do with freedom for responsible business to thrive. It's a crucial element of our vision. My father worked in the oil patch. I know the contributions he and his business made to Alberta. Alberta is built on the backs of hard work and entrepreneurial spirit. Business will be our most important partner in the crucial future we're entering, especially the work of diversifying our economy. The focus must be on improving our green technology, research and development, and moving away from our dependence on fossil fuels. Many more jobs than will be available for resource extraction can be created with a green economy, long-term jobs, renewable jobs.

Innovation and entrepreneurship are essential to fuel our journey, but they are not enough. We must create the conditions for all Albertans to participate and thrive and create wealth responsibly; that is, within limits, within rules that serve the long-term public interest. Business must be accountable to the community and to the future. Government's role is to ensure that business is accountable. When power determines success rather than fairness and morality, people lose hope and they drop out. They at least drop out of the political process where, increasingly, we need their input. Again, government must ensure that higher values than profits determine our development agenda.

Because of the importance of business to Alberta's prosperity and social development, we need to systematically review and reduce unnecessary red tape, those rules and regulations that do not provide better products or services or more accountable business. Business needs certainty. It needs a return on investment. It's up to government to ensure that we are not standing in the way of reasonable, responsible business. Business is an important partner, and with business we must play fair.

When it comes to climate change, the most serious threat of our time, most businesses want to do their part. We need to show leadership. We need to, with them and with Ottawa and with our neighbours to the south, harmonize our targets and timelines for emissions. We should also consider within that context a cap and trade system that moves beyond Alberta, new building code regulations, and public transit investments. We need to send a strong message to the private sector and to all Albertans that all of us are part of the problem; we are all part of the solution. Leadership is desperately needed now. We should be leading the world, not dragging our feet and catching up. A fair, consistent set of rules and standards from government gives business the freedom to thrive.

4:10

Our third principle as part of a vision for Alberta is a smart, hard-working government. The fundamental purpose of government is to manage and distribute resources in the long-term public interest. The complexity, however, of our lives and development demands a much higher level of knowledge and analysis than we have in history. It requires the best science balanced with grounded practitioners and infused with public values. Good public policy, healthy public policy looks beyond immediate gain or loss to the long-term implications for a secure and prosperous future. This includes consistent support for our most vulnerable: seniors, disabled, and the low-income. We have yet to live up to that moral imperative.

Effective, efficient programs and services arise from careful plans developed with a clear understanding of the issues. Alberta's embarrassment of oil and gas riches has made it far too easy for government to throw money at problems. That's not smart management, and it's not sustainable. Money does not solve problems; people do. We have spent virtually all of our nonrenewable resource revenues in the past 15 years. That is not smart.

For more effective and efficient government we must have openness and accountability of decisions and spending. We must move beyond closed-door meetings and decisions that fail the test of transparency. How can we be more focused on understanding and respecting each other and less focused, too, on scoring political points? The all-party committees, as I've said, are a welcome addition to a more constructive process in policy-making. Question period is a time for tough questions. How can we make it more productive?

In the end our work will be measured in terms of whether people are inspired, engaged, and empowered to work for healthier

communities. We will never have the resources and services our growing population may need if we are not fundamentally contributing to caring, respectful, and secure communities. Clearly, that has to start here.

Finally, our fourth pillar in our vision: our promise to Albertans must include a fairness to future generations. For too long we have embraced short-term goals, cut programs in bad times and spent heavily in good times, the very reverse of what prudent economists and advisers have done in the last 50 years. We cannot do this again. This shortsightedness is an abdication of this generation's duty to the next to provide a lasting legacy for our children and our grandchildren that all of us will be proud of. The next generation has the same desire for prosperity as we, the same need for clean air, water, and land, the same fundamental right to a vibrant democracy, the same urge to live and grow and learn to reach their full potential as citizens.

As soon as feasible we must implement a savings plan that's serious and an investment strategy for future generations. We must set aside a portion of nonrenewable resource revenue. That remains a key part of the Alberta Liberal philosophy even in these most challenging of times. The changing economic reality means that we cannot save as much as we would like, but the fact remains that oil and gas are running out, and we must turn some of that temporary wealth into sustainable income. We must invest in our future. Every dollar of nonrenewable resource wealth we save today means revenue for our future, sustainable revenue our grandchildren's children can count on.

The situation we find ourselves in today is precisely the kind of predicament my immediate predecessor, the Member for Edmonton-Riverview, wanted to avoid. That's why he aggressively championed the need for a savings plan for Alberta since his time in the Legislature, one that would have left us with billions of dollars in savings and investment for the future, allowing us to live off the interest.

Our current economic challenges in the context of climate change, then, compel us to move quickly to green our economy. We have suggested the creation of a Premier's council on a green economy. Very complex. We need the best of minds provincially, nationally, and internationally to help us move on this agenda. We need to diversify energy and reduce our environmental footprint. It can be a win-win-win for energy, the economy, and the environment. Such a plan will require our best minds from every sector: industry, academia, government, and nonprofit organizations. We need these minds to move us into a postcarbon future, where everything from urban planning to public transportation, housing, electricity, and especially water management must be handled differently. We know too much to be carrying on with business as usual.

In conclusion, it's time for courageous and visionary leadership that renews public trust, that builds a sense of confidence and hope in the future. Many people I meet these days are anxious about the future for themselves and for their children. They want to see a larger vision of the Alberta they have dreamed of. They want a leader with commitments to new energy and technology, research and new jobs, and a commitment to a lasting quality of life.

Over and above our fiscal responsibility to future generations is that response to climate change. No matter how many billions of dollars we manage to save in our heritage fund, that wealth will be useless if we fail to protect the environment. If we do nothing, climate change will imperil our water supply, our food security. It will put our entire society at risk. It will impact tourism. It is already impacting forestry and agriculture. Our emissions threaten our fellow Canadians, indeed the planet.

We are not the bad guys, but we must take responsibility for our share of the problem. Let's work with industry to set targets and develop technology that will lead to real reductions in emissions, not intensity reductions, which our present targets are about. As I noted earlier, let's start a serious commitment to building green infrastructure and reduce our overall dependence on fossil fuels.

We have a duty to ensure that Alberta's promise can be kept for our grandchildren. We have embraced one way of thinking for the last 40 years. It's time to change course, to pursue aggressively the approaches that will meet tomorrow's challenges. The great philosopher Wayne Gretzky said: I don't go where the puck is; I go where the puck is going to be. We need to think like that.

A new approach is necessary for the continued health and prosperity of our people, and together we can restore hope and purpose. Together Albertans of all cultures and ideologies, including Conservatives and Liberals and New Democrats, can work as one to realize Alberta's vast untapped and endangered potential. Together Albertans can refresh and reinvigorate not only the political landscape and discourse; we can refresh and invigorate our economy, our public institutions, and our relationships with the rest of Canada. Only by working together will we move forward and build a better Alberta that we can be proud of.

We have challenges. They must be met, and for us the government, this is the greatest gift we can give to our society. No one is going to meet the challenges for us, not solely us under the dome. We need to engage every citizen of Alberta in this great enterprise. When we recognize the enormity of this task, we cannot but be humbled and, hopefully, open to listening to each other more fully and finding a better way together.

4:20

I know that many Albertans believe that change is impossible. They've given up. I've met them at the doors. I don't feel that way at all, and I know most of you don't either. I believe that change is inevitable. The question is whether we will take charge of change or that change will take charge of us. I know Albertans. I know how they will put themselves out to build a better tomorrow. They will make sacrifices for the sake of family, friends. Even for strangers we make sacrifices. We are Albertans, after all.

In my work and in my travels from South Africa to the Philippines, from Nepal to Iraq to Africa, I've seen the depths of human misery. I've also seen the heights of nobility and heroism. Human beings can accomplish miracles. Albertans can and will transform ourselves from a people living from boom to bust to a healthy, interdependent, innovative, and sustainable society.

The Alberta Liberal caucus stands firmly with the people of Alberta and is here to put this government on notice. If it is not prepared to enter the 21st century with some humility, courage, and a bigger vision for us and for our children's children, then do not expect to be government next time. Easter Island is a symbol we understand, and it is rousing conscious Albertans to action. Albertans may be discouraged, they may be cynical about politics and politicians, but they are not impotent, and they are not stupid. After discouragement comes anger, and with anger comes empowered men, women, and children who will not be intimidated by the trappings of power. They are increasingly prepared to speak the truth to power and to take back control of their future if we are not prepared to lead.

Alberta Liberals are here for all Alberta, and we will leave no one behind. That is the promise of Alberta, and that is our promise to Albertans. Fellow legislators, fellow Albertans, in the name of sanity and humanity let us move forward together.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Mr. Vandermeer: Mr. Speaker, I just have a simple question for the new hon. Leader of the Opposition. You talk about that we should have more of a savings plan. In order to save more, that means we need to spend less. So if you were Premier, I would like to know where you would cut. Would that be in education? In health care? Seniors? The homeless? The Calgary ring road? Children's services? I'd like you to be specific, and I don't want you to give us any political fast food. You have a long list that would require more spending, yet on the other hand you say that we need to save more. Can you explain that to me and be really specific where we would save?

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not sure it's about spending more; it's about spending smarter. We are spending 23 per cent more than any other jurisdiction in Canada for government services today. How much do we know about the impacts of that spending, especially in the health care system? How is it that we had a \$1.3 billion overspending in the last year? Where is that money going? How is it that we were in such a rush to pay off the financial debt of this province that we were willing to take on a massive environmental debt and a social debt? Those are the kinds of smart business decisions that I think Albertans expect, that we spend during down times like this; we save during boom times. We have not seen that kind of leadership, and Albertans want that. That's what I'm hearing.

The Speaker: Additional questions? The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I noticed probably about three-quarters of the way through the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition's speech that he mentioned something about the embarrassment of riches with oil and gas revenue and that the current government was just throwing money at problems and that money does not solve problems; people do. Does that symbolize a change in direction in your caucus in that we will not be hearing questions about spending money on the various programs in almost every single department that we have in our province?

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I think the question really should be: how are we spending our wealth? How much do we know about how the dollars are translating into better outcomes for families, better health, better business opportunities and generating the kind of sustainable energy resource that we say we need? That is the focus, really, of what our caucus will be challenging the government on: not spending more, spending smarter.

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

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to respond here. I've always felt that this member's heart is in the right place even though we may not agree on every issue. He mentioned a couple of times about spending smarter. I guess I would echo the concerns of my friend the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, and I would ask again where he would cut if he were Premier or where he would tax more, what types of taxes he would introduce.

Dr. Swann: I think one of the key questions that is behind this question is: when will we see a more transparent government that will allow us to see more details about why the money is being spent so heavily in the health care system with so little result? What's happening to the P3s? What is the actual short-term benefit and the longer term cost to the public purse? Our investment in the environment: what is the investment per saving of water and air? Let's start putting some indicators out there and giving us access to the details of where the money is actually going and how you are actually measuring the results of the spending.

As far as tax is concerned, clearly a progressive tax would actually move us towards a much more fair opportunity for managing within our limited means and not being so dependent on fossil fuels. Why are we adding taxes to the Blue Cross program and to seniors' drug programs when what they're really doing is . . .

The Speaker: I'm sorry to interrupt, but I think we've now exhausted that portion of the agenda.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, did you wish to be recognized?

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of Alberta's NDP I'm very pleased to respond to His Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech from the Throne and the government's plans for the coming session. Our province's economy is quickly headed downhill, but this government's answer is business as usual. Yesterday's speech begged Albertans to have confidence in this government but offered them nowhere to find it. There appears to be absolutely nothing in this government's plan about refocusing our economy on renewable energy, a fundamental change Alberta needs if we are to keep from falling into the abyss of a prolonged recession. They refuse to follow the example being set by other countries around the world. The Conservatives are sleepwalking towards disaster, and their arrogance threatens to take thousands of working Albertans down with them.

This Speech from the Throne ignores the global transition to economies based on renewable energies. Alberta is at a crossroads, and everyday Albertans are looking for leadership from their government. While virtually every other jurisdiction in the world is announcing stimulus packages to help people face the inevitable job losses that are coming, this government announced nothing. Instead, it remains steadfast in its naive hope that the market will take care of itself.

Mr. Speaker, that's what has got us into this mess in the first place, and I'm sure that it won't help us get out. We are set to take in significantly reduced revenues from the oil and gas sector, from business taxes, and from personal income taxes as unemployment continues to rise, yet this government insists that Alberta is cushioned from this downturn. The government insists it will not consider any new ideas. The Premier has said that his plan is to stay the course. Those words are reminiscent of former U.S. President George W. Bush, whose disastrous environmental policies this government has slavishly followed for the last eight years. We are in a new era, and we must change our course if we do not wish to be left behind. The free ride on greenhouse gas emissions that the Conservatives were given during the Bush years is over. It's time to plan ahead for a new economy, for new jobs for Albertans based on renewable energies that we can show to the world.

4:30

Working Albertans will not stand by idly as this government continues its path towards economic ruin. We do not believe that we can just wait for things to right themselves. It is a time to change

our course, to create an Alberta whose fortunes are sustainable well into the future. To that end, Mr. Speaker, Alberta's NDP caucus has identified three areas of focus, all of which will serve to represent the interests of regular Albertans and their families.

First, we will fight to protect real jobs and show that thousands of long-term jobs, real jobs, can be created by investing in forward-looking industries that are based on sustainable business practices, technological innovation, and environmental stewardship. Second, we will continue to expose this government's secret health care agenda to delist and privatize health services. We will counter the myth they try to peddle to the people of this province about the unsustainability of the public system. Finally, Mr. Speaker, we'll pull back the curtains on this government's so-called environmental plan.

It's clear that behind the closed doors of government there is no desire or initiative to clean up the tar sands or the tar ponds. As each day passes without a real plan, the tar sands become a growing liability to our province. Unless this government commits to change, what was once a story of 500 dead ducks will soon become the story of 50,000 unemployed Albertans. Mr. Speaker, investment in education, publicly funded infrastructure, and a green economy all create more jobs per dollar than investments in handouts to the oil and gas industry. Albertans are already facing record job losses because of the slowdown in the oil and gas sector. Most plans to build upgraders and new extraction sites in Alberta have been mothballed or cancelled. The results are increasingly regular announcements of job layoffs, and it is government's role to step in and offer alternatives for Alberta's families.

An obvious starting point would be the reduction and eventual elimination of the sale of unrefined bitumen from this province. This government is actually working with American oil companies to allow unprocessed bitumen to continue to flow to the United States and along with it thousands of construction and long-term jobs. Even the Premier likened the sale of unprocessed bitumen to scraping the topsoil from the farm and selling it, and he promised to end the practice, a promise he has since ignored.

It has become clear that the world's future economic basis needs a transition from fossil fuels to renewable energies. Mr. Speaker, about a year ago Barack Obama said: the question is not if a renewable energy economy will thrive in the future; it's where. Alberta as the energy capital of Canada should be leading the transition and ensuring that jobs that go with the transition are here, in this province. However, this government remains fixated on the status quo. This lack of foresight will have tremendous impact on our future wealth as a province. This environmental foot-dragging threatens to deny Alberta a seat at the table when it comes to negotiating sustainable energy agreements with the United States. Real job creation comes from innovation and government support of new technologies that will serve an economy based on renewable energy.

The \$2 billion corporate handout government has earmarked for carbon capture and sequestration should be redirected towards small businesses to develop green technologies. This money would create thousands of full-time jobs and help Alberta position itself to become the hub of a North American green energy economy.

Investment in other sectors, like child care and agriculture, also creates jobs and stimulates a sagging economy. Working Alberta families need more affordable child care spaces. While the government claims to have created a number of new spaces, what they don't tell us is how many have been lost and what the costs to families are. What we don't need is more doublespeak and misinformation from this tired old government.

Mr. Speaker, farming families have been the backbone of our province since it was founded, but they are virtually ignored in this throne speech. We need a government that puts family farms ahead of big packing plants and agribusiness. We need to stop subsidizing big corporations and invest in local producers. That's how you stimulate an economy and keep Albertans working.

Publicly funded universal health care is one of Canada's international hallmarks. It is, in my view, the greatest gift from our party to the people of Canada. Ordinary Canadians and Albertans rely on the services our health care system provides. Albertans don't want to pay for private health insurance. They do not want to be forced to forgo necessary medical treatment for fear of huge bills, and they certainly do not want to be placed in a position where they have to choose between buying the drugs they need or paying the rent.

What Albertans do want, Mr. Speaker, is a health care system that is fully funded, accessible in both urban and rural communities, and properly staffed. They deserve to know that the truth is that such a system is not only affordable but is also sustainable now and into the future. Unfortunately, we are continuously being sold a bill a goods by a government that is morally and intellectually bankrupt. They try to tell us that a system such as this is an impossible dream. They're wrong. We will continue the fight for universal health care that everyday Albertans want.

Upon his election this Premier promised Albertans a more transparent and accountable government, but nothing has changed. The government has yet to demonstrate how the establishment of a superboard benefits ordinary Albertans. Mr. Speaker, it eliminates the last vestiges of local control over the health care system. The truth is that study after study has proven that investment in public health care services creates more jobs and saves more lives than private health care, and it does so for much less money. Until this government starts listening to Albertans and stops promoting U.S. style health care, Alberta's NDP will continue to fight for publicly funded, publicly delivered health care that meets the needs of all Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, finally, reclaiming our environment and setting a better example of environmental stewardship on the world stage is essential to any plan aimed at stimulating our economy and preparing it for the transition to sustainability. Prior to the recent election of President Barack Obama the Alberta government took advantage of an eight-year free ride under the disastrous environmental policies of the Bush administration. President Obama has made it clear that those days are over.

Alberta must quickly change its course, or it will be isolated and left behind. There is growing discontent throughout the world, including in the United States, about Alberta's lack of environmental protection for the tar sands. Alberta has a black eye that can be seen from space, and it is now putting working Albertans' jobs at risk. The Obama administration has committed \$55 billion for the development of green technology, which is four times the per capita amount that Canada has promised. This government has a lot of catching up to do, and the time to start is now, in this session.

Mr. Speaker, the NDP's green strategy promotes several initiatives that would set a new course for repairing Alberta's environment and preparing for its future. Immediate funding for home retrofits would not only save homeowners money, create jobs in the construction, service, and retail sectors, but it would also reduce Albertans' environmental footprint. Our green energy strategy calls for the establishment of a fund to provide interest-free loans and grants to individuals, groups, and municipalities that make energy-conscious choices.

Most importantly, Mr. Speaker, this government must rewrite legislation to include appropriate penalties, not mere slaps on the

wrist, for polluting industries. Too often we have seen instances in which companies continue to pollute the air and water and put wildlife and human health at risk because they know the current legislation is weak and the consequences of violations insignificant.

Mr. Speaker, I want to just take a moment to speak about Bill 1. The men and women who bravely serve on our behalf in the Canadian armed forces deserve our greatest respect and honour. It seems obvious that we should protect the jobs of reservists who have been called up to serve on our behalf. Yet after nearly six years, perhaps seven years, of fighting in Afghanistan, Alberta has dragged its feet on this issue and is the last province in the country to bring forward legislation to protect reservists' jobs. I think we can do better. We should have done better for those people who are willing to serve.

Our province faces greater challenges today than it ever has, and it's clear by their delays that this government has no idea of what is needed to address the looming recession. We are concerned by government's constant references to the delisting and privatization of health care services and by their ongoing failure to take the issue of environmental protection seriously. The actions of this government show that they have absolutely no commitment to end their unsustainable dependency on fossil fuels or to shield Alberta's families from this recession.

4:40

Mr. Speaker, this has become perhaps the most secretive government in Canada despite clear assurances to that effect over the last year, including the last throne speech. Alberta's NDP will continue to demand openness from this government regarding its plans for health care, we will insist that it take responsibility for its environmental record, and we will fight to protect jobs against a government that would prefer to increase the welfare rolls.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of everyday Albertans, who deserve better and demand more, Alberta's NDP will be voting against this throne speech.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

I fail to see anyone wanting to participate, so I shall proceed and recognize the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise and respond to the Speech from the Throne. First, I want to thank the government for a good, comprehensive look at our present and our future. The themes identified in the speech given by His Honour the Lieutenant Governor, Norman Kwong, emphasized just how great a province Alberta is and how fortunate we are to be able to call ourselves Albertans. Over the last 100 years thousands of people in waves and at different times throughout the century have left their respective homelands and migrated here to start new lives. I cannot imagine the thoughts and fears these people must have felt in those early days when they made decisions to leave their families in some cases and everything familiar and travel into the unknown. All they knew was that this was a land of opportunity.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

I remember my grandfather and grandmother coming here from the steppes of Russia, and I remember the stories he told me of what it was like when he arrived here, homesteaded, and started to raise a family. I also remember that he, like others I knew, were often reluctant to talk much about their life in the old country. He only spoke of a couple of instances that confirmed their resolve to

emigrate to the new world. One story had to do with an attempt to assassinate one of the members of the Russian monarchy as they were travelling in a parade in the city of St. Petersburg. Mr. Speaker, my grandfather, instead, focused on his life here in Canada and here in Alberta. His absolute, unwavering intent was to be Canadian and Albertan. He talked about how he had to work to be a part of the community, to work together in order to make it through those early years.

I grew up listening to my grandfather and watching and learning from my father as I was constantly reminded of how they lived through the Dirty Thirties and how they had to tighten their belts and make do. I was forever reminded of the importance of saving for a time when things might not be so good and these savings would be needed in order to make it through the tough times.

Mr. Speaker, living through those tough times had a very strong impact on their lives. My family was very reluctant to spend any money they didn't have. My dad only went into debt for a short time if he was positive he could pay that debt off and at the same time acquire something necessary for his farm, like a new tractor to replace the worn one or a piece of machinery that made farming more efficient. At the same time, we didn't do without as we grew up. I think it gave us a greater appreciation of what we had. I thank my dad now for being that way, even though when I was small, I was envious of some of the things kids my age had.

No one predicted the Dirty Thirties, at least not to the extent they were. Likewise, this global recession was not predicted even as short as six months ago. We as Albertans have learned from our grandfathers and our fathers, and I feel so fortunate that our government put savings away just in case. This is indeed going to help us, as was mentioned in the throne speech, weather the downturn, and it will indeed position us as a province to come out ahead of the curve when the economy does turn around again, and it surely will, just like the second half of the last century did. Alberta led the country in so many ways just last year, and we will lead the pack again.

Mr. Speaker, as I travelled to various state capitals in the Pacific Northwest this last month, I was constantly reminded of perhaps where we would be if we had not saved for this rainy day. Of the jurisdictions I had an opportunity to visit, only one other has the same opportunity as Alberta. Alaska also has a savings account set aside for such a possibility. They are also, like us, the only other jurisdiction who will be able to move forward without making devastating cuts to their budgets. They, like us, are tightening their belts and moving on.

I'm constantly reminded of the poem *If* by Rudyard Kipling and a couple of lines from it, which I paraphrase.

If you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you . . .
Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,
And stoop and build 'em up with worn-out tools . . .
If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it.

Mr. Speaker, over the last while there's been so much discussion and negative reaction as to where Alberta has gone in these past years, but I can only say that I am proud and thankful for what we have done and where we have gone. As I mentioned, we are in an enviable position. This comes with leadership, with leadership and common sense, something that also comes from our forefathers. We have a great deal of opportunity to improve the successes we have with our economic future. As Alberta is an exporting jurisdiction, our opportunities for the future do hinge, as was outlined in the throne speech, on ensuring that we increase our ability to trade and

compete in the world marketplace. I believe that we've been doing a much-needed job not only for North Americans but also our trading partners globally as to the safety of our agricultural products and the environmental responsibility we take with all our energy resources.

As the present Alberta lead for the Pacific Northwest Economic Region I'm fortunate to be a part of an organization that is focused on just that: supporting and enhancing our already healthy trade relationship with our largest trading partner, the United States. There's a good reason why the world's second-largest energy producer, Alberta, is right next door to the world's largest energy customer, the United States, and we are good neighbours and allies. As we go forward, it only makes good sense to improve that relationship and to streamline the efficiency of trading back and forth between our jurisdictions and to increase the security and safety of such trade as well. That is why I believe that it is vital that we improve our ability to do this.

I'm speaking about the fact that at present Alberta does such a high volume of trade with the United States, all funneled through only one 24-hour commercial port of entry at Coutts-Sweet Grass. To improve this element, it's imperative that another similar port be established at Wild Horse at the southeast corner of our province. I'm encouraged that the Alberta government is fully supportive of this and continues to urge the federal government in Ottawa to implement this as soon as possible.

Mr. Speaker, the new provincial energy strategy is a work that's long overdue. Natural gas plays from southeast Alberta have made up the largest percentage of royalty revenues for Alberta for many, many years. This area will be a major player for many years to come. Southern Alberta is also an area that has the best potential for wind energy anywhere in North America. Perhaps that's why many of us from there also walk with a permanent lean to the west. I don't know.

The opportunity for alternative energy production is enhanced by the world concern for more green energy, and I believe Alberta is poised to be a major player in not only wind energy but solar as well, with Medicine Hat as the sunniest city in Canada.

As was mentioned in the throne speech, agriculture and agrifood industries are large economic drivers. I'm proud to be an Albertan and proud to be an agriculture producer. Our forefathers who migrated here and homesteaded here proved that agriculture is an important mainstay in our economy. They settled this land and made it what it is today. I look forward to the future with the support that our government is showing in the agricultural industry.

4:50

Mr. Speaker, as I drive through all parts of Alberta, it's easy to see how much development and activity is going on. You can't help but notice all the development in and around our two major cities, Calgary and Edmonton. Medicine Hat, which hit 60,000 in population last year, has now also come of age and has moved ahead with a great deal of development, both residential and commercial. The big box stores that have gone up this last year are providing service options and employment opportunities that previously could only be had in the big cities.

I also look forward to the redevelopment and expansion of the Medicine Hat regional hospital, which was announced last year. In my mind, the priority is there, and I'm waiting for the shovel to be put in the ground. Likewise, the small expansion that was announced over three years ago for the Bow Island hospital in my constituency is one that has to be started and completed.

Mr. Speaker, there are perhaps two main reasons that people move to Alberta: jobs and opportunity. It's the best place to live, work,

and raise a family. The reason they stay here is because it's the most beautiful land in Canada. I'm encouraged by our government's approach to our land, namely the land-use framework, which will allow everyone, no matter who they are or from what walk of life, to pursue their respective interests and enjoy and share our land but not to the detriment of any others' interests.

Mr. Speaker, water or the future limitations and lack of it is perhaps the biggest single issue facing where I live in southern Alberta. The water for life strategy, championed by my predecessor, Dr. Lorne Taylor, from Cypress-Medicine Hat, has set the stage for addressing Alberta's water challenges. With the new watershed advisory committees I'm very hopeful that good water management will sustain us in southern Alberta long into the future. Quite frankly, water or the lack thereof is the limiting factor for growth. I'm aware of and fully supportive of the needs of our environment as well as our economy.

Innovation and technology are great to talk about. Even if I don't understand most of it – and I'm sure I'm not alone – I believe it must be embraced. As an example, you don't need to show me how the new computers or the BlackBerrys work. I don't need to know that and wouldn't understand anyway. Just show me how to use them, and I'll make them a part of my life. I find it amazing that the things that were considered science fiction not so many years ago are now so commonplace. I often wonder what my grandfather or father would think of things like cellphones and nanotechnology.

Speaking of technology, I'm pleased that our government saw fit to support the Canadian Centre for Unmanned Vehicle Systems, which is located in Medicine Hat in southeast Alberta. The innovation and technology breakthroughs that are coming from our universities and colleges regarding such things as nanotechnology and artificial intelligence will make the companies that now utilize this centre better able to expand their developments, provide the incentives for more companies to locate here, and be the leading edge in world markets in the future.

Mr. Speaker, our population is aging, and it's estimated that a full 25 per cent or more will be seniors by the year 2020. A commitment to build so many affordable housing units and to also be able to offer options for housing is also encouraging. I may need one of those types of units myself in the future. I'm glad we recognize our seniors, the people with disabilities, and those most vulnerable.

I'm also pleased that our government is committed to keeping the RCMP as the official police force for Alberta. At the same time, the implementation of the Alberta sheriff program to supplement is a bonus that is definitely helping improve safety on our highways. I do drive a lot of miles on Alberta highways in a year, and I did speed. I'll admit it. I was strongly encouraged to slow down, and I've done so, and I think I'm a much safer driver now. I set out on each trip just a little earlier.

Mr. Speaker, many will say that we are in the most challenging time of our lives, and I tend to agree. As I look through all we have done and all we have before us to do, I think I can say that we as Albertans still have that spirit that we inherited from our ancestors, and we're up to the task. As my grandfather and my dad used to say when they talked about the Depression of the Dirty Thirties, you just have to tighten up your belt and work hard with a continuity of purpose. Or as in the words of Rudyard Kipling, "If you can fill the unforgiving minute with sixty seconds' worth of distance run, yours is the Earth and everything that's in it."

Thank you, Mr. Premier. Thank you, Alberta. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of question and comment. Would any hon. member like to take that five minutes?

Seeing none, I would like to recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to rise in this House today to offer my response to the Speech from the Throne. As you and this House are aware, this is my second opportunity to listen to a Speech from the Throne delivered by this government. Again, much like the first one, it was chock full of references to this government's past glories, alleged and otherwise, and it at least in rhetoric seemed sure of the wisdom of its present course. In fact, when I left the throne speech yesterday afternoon, I thought for a second that as a member of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition I could take the rest of the session off as once again the Progressive Conservative government has this province firmly going in the right direction, and the past decisions of this government have left this province of Alberta as a modern-day equivalent of Shangri-La.

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

Now, for those of you who don't know, Shangri-La is a fictional place described in a 1933 novel by James Hilton. In the book Shangri-La is a mystical, harmonious valley gently guided from a lamasery enclosed in the west end of the Kunlun Mountains. Shangri-La has become synonymous with an earthly paradise but particularly a Himalayan utopia, a permanently happy place isolated from the outside world.

To be honest, I left the throne speech a little shaken up. Have I gotten it all wrong? Does this government really have everything under control as indicated in the throne speech? Like a good little student of history I went back over the last number of years to throne speeches in the past, and guess what? I feel better now. I really have not gotten it all wrong. You know why? Those throne speeches were full of the same colourful language, juicy sound bites, and false bravado that this one had.

[The Speaker in the chair]

They contained statements like: Alberta will never go into debt again. Or how about this one: protecting our environment is job one of this government. How about this: we have an exciting plan for health care. That was in the throne speech back when the now-infamous Bill 11 was introduced. That exciting plan was to move Albertans to private health care. After reading those throne speeches, I can only conclude that historically Conservatives' throne speeches are either replete with mere platitudes or that this government does not really follow through on what it lays out at the beginning of the new legislative year.

With this being the case, I took a more critical look at yesterday's throne speech, and now it seems to me more of the same, a bunch of sound bites attempting to hide the fact that the government is unsure of where it has been and equally unsure of where it wants to go. At its core this is a government with no true vision of what Alberta should be and, more importantly, what Alberta could be. It's a government that doesn't appear to have a plan.

Let's just come clean here for a second: we didn't have a plan for the boom. That was and, in fact, has been admitted. Unfortunately, it now appears that with some tough times facing us, it is equally true that we do not have a plan for the bust either. Despite the flowery language in the throne speech Alberta is no Shangri-La, though ironically yesterday's throne speech was a nice piece of fiction.

Let's talk about how Alberta really is. As we are all aware, currently and going back for some time much of Alberta's good fortune is a product of our abundant supply of fossil fuel resources. Truly, this has been manna from heaven. Fossil fuels have allowed us to become a have province since 1947. During the past 10 years no other provincial government has brought in near the per capita revenue stream that Alberta has. This abundance has in turn led to the fact that last year Alberta spent approximately 23 per cent more per capita than Ontario did. Pretty astonishing for the belt-tightening, conservative province we allegedly are.

5:00

These statistics highlight how much resource we bring in and then spend. With this spending one would think Albertans could expect that our infrastructure, hospitals, public education system, for example, should be heads and tails above other provinces. Looking at these statistics, we should expect that Alberta would have the lowest wait times in emergency rooms, that we have shown leadership on the environment and made tough decisions on green investments to diversify our economy, that per capita our cities were adequately policed. They would assume that in Alberta no child went to school hungry.

However, that is not the case. Alberta is in the middle of the pack when it comes to hospital wait times. Environmental groups do not applaud us for our vision of protecting our water, forests, or air. Compare Calgary's and Edmonton's policing per capita numbers, and they are dramatically lower than for other large cities in Canada. Estimates are that 70,000 children in Alberta go to school hungry every day. Given all this, it's a fair question for people to ask: are we getting value for our hard-earned tax dollars? I can only say that from my perspective the answer is no. We are spending, but we are not investing.

I am even going to go out on a limb and tell you the reason why. Economists will tell you that economies are cyclical, that economies have a pulse and beat of their own. Sometimes they perform well; sometimes they falter. When economies are performing well, goods, services, labour, and the like are all more expensive. When economies falter, these goods, services, and labour become less expensive. Yes, I remember that from economics 201.

Now, given that this is how things work and given that governments can choose to spend money, that can and does influence these economic cycles, I am of the belief that government should do more of its spending when the economy is not doing well and less of it when it is booming. Call me crazy, but this makes sense. Governments all over the world, in fact our own Conservative government in Ottawa, have now returned to this philosophy.

I hope I won't get any of my right-wing friends in this House too upset by using the term "Keynesian economics," but that's essentially what it is. However, instead of following this basic principle, the Progressive Conservative government in Alberta has insisted on doing things backwards. Time and time again this government spends itself silly in the boom cycle of the economy. Just take a look at our spending over the last five years.

Now, we all know why this happened. The spending was done in a frantic effort to erase the mistake of Klein-era cuts. Where does this leave us now? Well, I guess it leaves us back at the beginning. We are now at a point where we can rectify this spending glitch. If I were in this government, I would try to do more of my spending when the economic cycle called for prudent investment and spend less when the economy was performing well and costs were high. Like all things this current economic situation will pass. However, what I am hoping has also passed is this government's haphazard manner of spending money at the wrong times in economic cycles.

In other words, like Keynesians say, government should spend money when necessary and save money when times are good.

Please do not interpret what I just said as a licence to simply go throw money around willy-nilly in this current downturn. As noted, we already spend 23 per cent more per capita than Ontario. I am not suggesting that we need to increase this, but here's what I am saying: given these economic times, we may find Albertans looking for work, and if this turns out to be the case, this gives us possible opportunities. We can do some things if this government shows some leadership.

Just as an example, we could bolster our long-term economic health by keeping more of our oil and gas wealth here at home. Right now we ship countless tonnes of unprocessed bitumen to the United States for upgrading. We could add thousands of well-paying jobs to our economy by building more upgraders here in Alberta and selling upgraded oil rather than raw bitumen. This brings more money to Alberta, money we can use to upgrade our infrastructure, improve public programs, and keep taxes low. The second thing I think is important is that we build more upgraders in Alberta.

As a general manner of course we have to do better on our green economy. We can do this by building more wind farms, capturing carbon, creating new building codes, requiring environmentally friendly office towers and factories, investing in public transit, and creating opportunities for every citizen and industry to reduce, reuse, and recycle. Alberta is home to some of the world's most brilliant entrepreneurs and corporations. We could make a fortune on green technology. Better yet, if we invest in green technology and become leaders in this field, we can export that technology to the world, enhancing our prosperity, protecting our environment, and creating jobs at the same time.

The third priority in my eyes if those opportunities are created is to possibly speed up our 10-year plan to end homelessness. Albertans need homes, tradespeople need work, and there's no time like the present to deliver on our commitment to end homelessness here in Alberta.

As time is short and I've gone on far too long already, I'd like to add that now also may be the time to bolster our police forces. Currently when we crunch the numbers, our cities' police forces are not adequately staffed. Edmonton and Calgary are in the middle of a gang war. Organized crime is active and thriving in our province. One way we can fight this is by acknowledging the fact that Alberta's major cities are just that: major cities. We need well-supported police forces large enough to address this reality. Our citizens deserve adequately funded police services, and they deserve safe communities.

These would be my priorities. I think they're priorities for many Albertans who simply want jobs, good health care, a place to call home, a healthy environment, and an assurance that their tax dollars are being invested wisely. Call it a common-sense Shangri-La.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's always my great honour to represent my constituency of Calgary-Fort. Today it is my great pleasure to rise and respond to the Speech from the Throne given by His Honour the Lieutenant Governor. Facing the Future with Confidence was the theme in the speech that His Honour delivered, and it is truly confidence that will help us persevere through this uncertain economic time.

My constituency of Calgary-Fort is made up of hard-working citizens. Many of them are my neighbours and friends. A number

of them have living and working experiences in many parts of the world. My constituents, like every one of us, strive to have a place to call their home, to make their living, and to raise their family. We all want a safe and prosperous Alberta.

The large Calgary Foothills industrial park in my constituency is the home of many businesses and manufacturers. They have been helping to create wealth for Albertan workers and for the public coffers through their products and services, which are for Canadian consumption and many export markets. Like all Albertans they are most concerned with the current state of the global economy. I know they fear for their job stability and worry about the well-being of their family and about what the future holds.

Calgary-Fort is an industrious and diverse community that will benefit from the public investment that the province is continuing to make in Albertans now and for the future. As with all the communities across the province it will benefit from the investments in infrastructure, education, health care, and most of all from the investment in safe communities. By showing our government's leadership and confidence during this global economic downturn cycle, my constituents will be able to take full advantage of the investments being made in them by the province.

My constituents need assistance in job transition and retraining. My business constituents need supporting measures for their problems with cash flow and credit availability. I'm very pleased that our government pays attention to and invests in this area. This investment will lead us through the challenging times and launch us in the coming cycle of growth.

5:10

Mr. Speaker, Alberta has faced many hardships in the past and has always persevered and come out stronger than before. I have confidence that we will once again rise above today's challenges and be triumphant because we Albertans have the freedom to create and the spirit to achieve. The Alberta government has a comprehensive plan that will lead us through this challenging time and will continue to make our Alberta the best place to live and work, a place of hopes and dreams.

It is important that we continue to invest in our province. A key investment being made is in new technologies and research and development projects. Research and development attracts talent and investment in our province, helping us to become a leader on the world stage. I'm excited to see new ideas and new discoveries that will be found in places such as the Calgary University Research Park, where I had the privilege of working for a number of years, and the Edmonton Research Park just south of here.

Businesses conduct advanced research in every field, such as medicine technology, biotechnology, telecommunications, software, and petroleum. By continued investment in research and new technology, we are protecting Albertans and also preparing our launch into the next growth of the economic cycle.

Mr. Speaker, as we move forward, we need to act with what I call the 4-E principle: acting in an ethical, economical, efficient, and effective manner. Within this 4-E principle is a need to invest in a way that achieves a big bang for the public buck, the need to do what is right for our citizens, and the need to build and invest in a responsible way.

I applaud the investments that have been outlined in the Speech from the Throne. One investment that particularly stands out to me, Mr. Speaker, is the government's commitment to military reservists. The Canadian Legion plays a large role in the Calgary-Fort constituency. Many reservists call Calgary-Fort their home. I have built a close relationship with the veterans and current reservists and cadets. I respect and admire their dedication to the security of our country

and of our province. In the past I have made suggestions for some ideas to honour and appreciate our military men and women, such as naming the Alberta veterans highway, creating scholarships for cadets, and accepting training and skills in the military as equivalent qualifications in civilian jobs.

I'm very pleased that the government is taking initiatives along this line. Bill 1, introduced this spring, will amend the employment standards act, protecting the jobs of those who serve our country. With this the government will be recognizing the invaluable contribution that Canadian military reservists make to ensure Canadian security at home and abroad. It will ensure that reservists who work in Alberta will be able to return to their prior employer upon return from their deployment. With this bill the government is showing respect for these reservists and their families, and they duly deserve that. Like all Albertans they are most concerned with the state of the economy as well.

I have been very passionate about the cause of reservists for many years as they are true heroes. They leave their families behind to defend our freedoms and help to make the world a better place. By providing job security, we can help the transition back to civilian life and provide peace of mind for the reservists and their families.

Mr. Speaker, it's my great honour to be here today responding to the Speech from the Throne. I believe that the government has outlined a plan that will help this province and all Albertans to cope with the current uncertainty and launch ourselves in the next growth economic cycle. I look forward to the implementation of the government plan ensuring Alberta's continued success and a productive spring session. Let's work together, making Alberta a place ample with freedom to create and a strong spirit to achieve. That is *Fortis et Liber*.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

I'll recognize, then, the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Whether I consider yesterday's throne speech from my point of view as the grateful husband of Heather, my very tolerant, hard-working, loving, and supporting wife of 40 years; whether from our shared roles as parents of an incredible daughter, Christina, and backed by her extremely devoted, hard-working husband, Vivek, both of whom are in turn very fortunate to have the support of his caring parents, Sothi and Achu, which all together provide Christina the luxury of being able to choose to stay at home to raise our two incredible preschool grandsons, Kiran and Rohan, upon whom the Alberta sun rises and sets, a fact to which my father, Bryce, will attest to any and all interested parties; whether I view the throne speech from the dutiful perspective of the twice-elected Member of the Legislative Assembly representing Calgary-Varsity, which is home to a large number of seniors, students, AISH recipients, persons with disabilities either physical or intellectual, their aging parents or care providers struggling to keep their home or a high-rented roof over their heads, who are the first to feel the recessionary effects; whether in my role as the official Alberta provincial opposition critic for Education, Children and Youth Services, and Tourism, Parks and Recreation; as a five-year member of the Public Accounts committee; or in my more recent role as a member of the all-party Standing Committee on Community Services, I am disappointed with the thin gruel the throne speech contains and the more sustaining meaty chunks that it is missing.

The throne speech is the latest in a long line of missed opportunities by a passive, noninterventionist government without a plan

which has squandered its opportunity to govern a province rich in both human and natural resources. Some members of this government have watched from the sidelines. Others have aimlessly ridden the boom and bust roller coaster that has twice rolled over this province within their 38-year governance mandate. With the first economic downturn of the 1980s the Alberta government's excuse or scapegoat was the national energy policy, which was not only vilified as being responsible for lost jobs in Alberta, but it was apparently also the sole cause for sky-high mortgage rates across Canada and hitherto inexplicable global misfortunes. After more than 25 years of dragging this skeletal blame from under the bed as the cause for everything that ails Alberta from the past to the present, it is time for this government to bury the bones and look into the mirror for more localized explanations of our current conundrum, explanations which were absent from yesterday's throne speech as were solutions.

This government's backpedalling prowess, its denial of fiscal reality, its ongoing inability to sustainably manage both Alberta's renewable and nonrenewable resources, its attempts to cover up or divert attention from its failures are rapidly losing the confidence of the majority of Albertans: 79 per cent of eligible voters rejected the March 3 menu that this government was offering. That massive March 3, 2008, rejection occurred when times were good for the majority of Albertans, when the government's apparent challenge was how fast it could spend the \$147 a barrel that each of millions of barrels of oil was bringing in.

5:20

The 1980s bumper sticker "Please, God, if I get another oil boom, I promise not . . ." was a faded memory although the NEP sticker of the same period dusted off by Alberta's Premier was sufficient to scare the remaining 21 per cent of eligible voters with Tory-blue blood flowing through their veins to give him an amazing majority in the form of 72 seats this past March. I wonder how many of those individuals, many of which now find themselves unemployed for either the first or the second bust time, were impressed by what they saw on their TVs yesterday as they sat at home contemplating how this throne speech would improve their re-employment chances. They were probably also wondering whether, if they were eligible for employment insurance, it would tide them over for the next two months while the Alberta government holds them ransom by withholding the budget.

It is said that if we don't learn from our historical mistakes, we are doomed to repeat them. The fact that this government adopted the concept of creating the Liberal stability fund, which they renamed the sustainability fund, will with its \$6 billion and change buy both itself and Albertans a little time.

Unfortunately, other Alberta provincial Liberal plans, which included inflation-proofing the heritage savings trust fund, Peter Lougheed's marvellous invention, were ignored by this government. Instead of building up the fund when times were good, especially when we experienced surpluses, which has been the case for the past 15 years, this government drew down the account. This government made poor investments. This government decreed that only one-third of surplus dollars would go to the fund.

Had this government heeded the advice of contributing to the fund annually when the Liberals recommended setting aside the equivalent of 10 per cent of all oil and gas revenue, not just one-third of the surplus, the fund would have grown to the point where interest alone would have replaced our financial dependence on nonrenewable traditional oil and gas revenue. Another 10 per cent of oil and gas revenue set aside as we recommended would have established a postsecondary endowment fund to promote intellectual research,

leading in part to much-needed economic diversification. The remaining 10 per cent of oil and gas revenue, if set aside as recommended, could have established a fund to catch up on deferred infrastructure projects and create a sustainable endowment fund for promoting arts and culture.

These Alberta Liberal fiscal strategies, unfortunately, were ignored by this government, who as recently as last fall believed that Alberta was insulated from the global recession. My esteemed colleague the Member for Edmonton-Riverview, the past leader of the Alberta provincial Liberal Party, who received his doctorate in economics, foresaw the signs of a potential economic downfall more than a year ago. Realizing that a more dramatic savings plan was needed, he suggested that a full 30 per cent of all oil and gas revenue be dedicated to the heritage trust fund. The government rejected his foresight, as it has previous Liberal fiscal and democratic recommendations.

While hindsight is 20/20, foresight is considerably more challenging. The first step in overcoming a problem begins with the admission that you have one. There is no doubt that Alberta has problems. Currently 40 per cent of Albertans are considered functionally illiterate. A fall 2008 Statistics Canada figure revealed that over 77,000 Alberta children were living below the poverty line. Given our current recession, unless the government intervenes quickly and efficiently, that number of vulnerable children will grow dramatically. Last year 19,000 women, many with children, sought refuge from abusive relationships but were turned away from women's shelters in Alberta. With the additional pressures of recession family stress will grow.

Last year this government ignored the plea from Inn from the Cold organization, which supports homeless families, for funding its downtown shelter. The primary reason for rejection was the proposed location although the government offered no other alternatives or support. The Inn from the Cold asked for a \$3 million government grant, which at that time was turned down. Fortunately, an anonymous philanthropist provided an interest-free loan, which means fewer families will have to move from church basement to church basement each night.

If this government is serious about a sustainable future, then it needs to start by protecting children, reducing poverty, and increasing educational opportunities. Currently programs like Breakfast for Learning, which receives no government funding, and Meals on Wheels, which through its duck soup program provides lunches for a very few fortunate schools and receives limited funding, are trying to bridge the crevasse left by this government's inaction. Due to the Calgary community's generosity and credit Breakfast for Learning reaches 50,000 disadvantaged Calgary children each year.

Despite continuing to be Canada's wealthiest province per capita, based primarily on our nonrenewable resources rather than government economic stewardship, one-third to one-quarter of high school students drop out with very costly results. One-quarter of eligible Alberta university students who have the required grades and can afford the inflated tuition are turned away due to lack of space. The government must begin to view education as a preventative measure, as a proactive investment, rather than as a fiscal liability. The best way to start is by establishing programs which identify children with learning disabilities before they arrive at school. The government has yet to live up to its Learning Commission's recommendations to fund optional full-day kindergarten or half-day junior kindergarten for children at risk. If the government is serious about addressing the dropout problem in high school, then it needs to take proactive preschool measures.

Putting a greater emphasis on not only protecting but nurturing children would reap tremendous benefits in the future. Currently

front-line children and youth workers are struggling under unmanageable caseloads. The recent deaths of two young children in the custody of the province tragically testify to the province's failure to protect children, to support families, whether birth or through fostering. Children's caregivers, especially those looking after children with disabilities, are particularly vulnerable. The worth, the strength of a government is based on how well it protects the most vulnerable, which include children, seniors, and the disabled. The plight of the most vulnerable Albertans was again not addressed by this throne speech. Albertans deserve better. It is our elected duty to deliver.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, and after that I'll recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour to rise today on behalf of the constituents of Edmonton-Calder to address this Assembly in response to the Speech from the Throne. When I learned last March that I was the MLA for Edmonton-Calder, I knew this government was going to do great things for the people of Alberta, and I wanted to be part of that greatness. Indeed, it seems that people in Atlantic Canada want to be part of it as well.

Mr. Speaker, I am a man of my constituency with roots that go back to my time in high school. Having most recently lived there for nearly a decade, my constituents appreciate that being a resident of Calder makes the issues personal and close to home. I take these issues very personally, and I am proud to know that our government and our Premier do as well. I would like to thank the hon. Premier for introducing Bill 1 into the House this session. It is a bill that is extremely important to the members of the Loyal Edmonton Regiment. The Loyal Eddies are an integral part of Edmonton-Calder constituency and deserve the protection of Bill 1.

I find reassurance in the fortunate position that Alberta has in the global economy. Prudent fiscal management has allowed our province to be debt free. This has permitted the government to set aside over \$7 billion in the sustainability fund. No other jurisdiction has actually done what Alberta has. Even though the market growth has slowed, we are better off here than in provinces with deficits, debts, and unsustainable programs. I feel confident in this government's ability to convert long-term savings into long-term growth. It will ensure that our position in the global economy remains unscathed and will create opportunities when Albertans need them most.

Mr. Speaker, this plan will allow Alberta to continue to build our communities responsibly. Maintaining Alberta's infrastructure and strategically building new projects will strengthen the connections in and outside of each community. Edmonton-Calder is the centre for rail, air, and road transportation in the Edmonton area. We like the sounds of propellers, locomotives, and trucks because if these sounds are missing in Calder, everyone is in trouble. This government's vision and commitment to infrastructure will keep the planes, trains, and automobiles of Edmonton-Calder busy moving the goods and services that everyone needs.

5:30

The expansion of the Anthony Henday is an exciting development not only for my constituency but all of Alberta. Strategic building like this has led to the creation of another major artery in Edmonton. Dispersing traffic over several major arteries will increase the safety of all Albertans on the roads. As a long-time member of the Canadian Society of Safety Engineering I value the importance of safety on the roads, in the household, and in the workplace.

As a government it is our job to ensure the safety of Albertans. By committing to increase Edmonton's police force by 300 officers over the next three years, we have proven that safety is a fundamental priority in our communities. Crime prevention is also an important aspect of this commitment. It is crucial that we keep gangs off our streets, ensuring the safety of our honest, hard-working Albertans.

By creating spaces for addiction and recovery services, we can help to improve the lives of those affected by drugs and alcohol. Several months ago I attended a meeting in the Sherbrooke community hall. Residents of the Sherbrooke community were concerned about the George Spady Centre opening a recovery house to give people with a troubled past a safe place to stay while preparing to enter the rehabilitation process. I attended this meeting out of concern for both parties.

At the end of the evening the George Spady Centre was welcomed by the community because the residents saw that the folks who were in that centre needed a safe place to live. They saw that they needed a hand up and that they needed a place to be where they would not be punished just for being different. Mr. Speaker, I saw the true compassion of my constituents that night. Ensuring the safety of every member of the community, not only for themselves, was a huge step forward for the folks in Sherbrooke.

This unconditional support is something that our government does for Albertans and is something that we must continue to do: to provide a safety net and support for each person in our province no matter how big or how small. In Edmonton-Calder one of the largest groups in need of this particular support is seniors. As the demographic of Alberta changes, there will be more seniors in need of support from this government. Seniors are a vital part of this province, and it is crucial that we continue to care for them by creating legislation and policies that will improve their standard of living.

The drug program benefit act is an example of a way that the province can provide continuing support to lower income seniors, and I know that many of the seniors in my constituency are particularly grateful for the support of this program. I have told the seniors in Edmonton-Calder's five major centres – Shepherd's Care, Rosslyn lodge, Venta Care, Extencicare, and Rosedale – that this province is fighting for their interests and, Mr. Speaker, I am fighting for the interests of Edmonton-Calder seniors.

We're all fighting for the strength of this province to improve the quality of life for those living here. While the current uncertainty in the global markets challenges us, it does not threaten us. Our province has always been a global leader in developing industry, and today is no different. This government is committed to continuing to build industry and provide jobs for Albertans. Nothing will change. We continue to be a major player in the world market.

As a member of both the Forest Industry Sustainability Committee and the Alberta Forestry Research Institute I know that there will continue to be challenges in Alberta's forestry sector. I was very sad to learn this week, Mr. Speaker, that my former employer, Millar Western Forest Products, the largest Alberta-owned forest products company, had been forced to reduce shifts in both of its facilities. This decision had to do with market demand, I might add. The forestry sector in Alberta is in trouble and must now face the challenge of constantly reinventing itself.

From nanotechnology to the development of modular floor materials for Sea-Cans, development is progressing. So from those things that are very, very small to those things that are very, very large, we must never forget that lumber is still the only building material that grows back. As this industry continues to advance, I am proud to say that this government will continue to find new ways

to reduce its footprint on the environment. Carbon capture is an incredible technology developed just to do this. We need to continue to ensure that future Albertans are left with the same rich, resourceful, and beautiful province that we have today.

Our advancing industries entice hard-working people to move to Alberta, and this is something we can continually be thankful for, but as our province grows, we must continue to ensure that services are provided to Albertans. We must continue to increase the accessibility of health care, education, affordable housing, and other vital needs and services. This year has seen a lot of change in the structure of Alberta Health, and these changes were designed to increase the accessibility of health care for all Albertans. The elimination of health care premiums is an example of the commitment to increased accessibility.

The same is true of education. Alberta's schools and postsecondary institutions are amongst the best in North America, and Edmonton-Calder is home to a great many schools. Particularly, we're proud of NAIT. NAIT is a remarkable institution that teaches people to succeed in industry and in the trades. By ensuring that postsecondary education remains affordable, we can be confident that future generations will take advantage of the opportunities. We can be assured that students will get the best education possible and will utilize this to become the future leaders of our province.

Another area we must strive to maintain affordability and accessibility to is housing. As a member of the capital region I'm well aware of the growing pressures of urban sprawl and the increasing costs of living in the city. Affordable housing is an issue that the people of Edmonton-Calder are quite familiar with, and I am proud to say that our government is continually providing additional living spaces for those who cannot afford a home of their own and providing means for Albertans who aspire to home ownership.

Now more than ever we must continue to work together to provide the support and the strength that the people of Alberta need. Having learned to play and work as a member of a team for my entire life, I value strength in numbers and the strength of unity. The strength of unity has always guided Alberta through uncertain times, and it will continue to do so today.

On behalf of my constituency I trust my elected peers to be fair and honourable stewards of the public purse, to take action to help and to protect those in need of our assistance, and to continue to make Alberta the most desirable place to live in Canada.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. member, then, for Calgary-Egmont.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my sincere privilege to rise today to respond to the Speech from the Throne, delivered by His Honour the Lieutenant Governor of Alberta.

Like many others I am an immigrant but from another province. Many times when I meet people, one of my first questions is where they came from. The fact that so many people have moved to our province of their own choice and volition and want to be here makes for a very incredibly positive environment. This is not a new development in my generation, Mr. Speaker. From our earliest history individuals have banded together to work for common goals to help those in need and to stand together to preserve and improve upon the safety and the well-being of others.

Mr. Speaker, I believe the historic success of this great province of ours can be attributed to many factors, an important one being the strength and courage of our people and another being our commitment to sound financial management, that this government clearly follows. This management has enabled us to eliminate health care

premiums, which will save Albertans over \$1 billion annually starting on January 1 of this year. This step was taken long before the global economic downturn began. Many other jurisdictions are going into debt with infrastructure stimulus packages, but fortunately we have more than \$6 billion in our capital account for this purpose.

Moving to another topic, Mr. Speaker, I'm also encouraged that the throne speech was not silent on seniors, many of whom live in my constituency of Calgary-Egmont. The Protection for Persons in Care Amendment Act will be introduced this session with the goal of better protecting our seniors from elder abuse, which sadly often comes from members of the senior's own family. As someone with grandparents aged 91 and 92 living in Calgary, I recognize the importance of this legislation for our seniors.

Mr. Speaker, I must also mention Bill 1, the Employment Standards (Reservist Leave) Amendment Act, 2009, which will provide job-protected leave for military reservists in Alberta. My father served in the military. I know the sacrifice that our servicemen and -women make for our country, and I'm proud to support our troops through this initiative.

Mr. Speaker, I've addressed several issues briefly, but now we should talk about a particular threat facing Calgary-Egmont and, in fact, all of our province, that being crime. My constituency includes several inner-city communities as well as some suburban areas. I first moved to this constituency when I came to Alberta, and I often remember my first day there; it was May 29. It's a great area in which many people were shocked by three murders on New Year's Day not too far from where I live. Far from the downtown core, it was on 94th Avenue.

Crime and, in particular, gang violence is not an issue localized to the downtown core or to particular neighbourhoods, Mr. Speaker. It affects every one of us regardless of our gender, race, colour, creed, religion, socioeconomic status, the location of our residence, or any other personal factor we may have. Make no mistake: gang violence in particular poses a serious threat today. Gangs operate in an atmosphere of violence and intimidation and are a stain on the fabric of this great province of ours.

5:40

Even if you are not a direct victim of crime, I ask you, Mr. Speaker, to consider the cost to society. Consider the cost of fraud to businesses that is passed on to consumers through higher prices, fees, or interest rates. Consider the danger gang violence poses to police and others. Consider the pressure all crime places on our court systems. Consider that it is our tax dollars that fund these operations. This simply cannot be allowed to get out of control. I put to this Assembly that people who have nothing but disregard for law and order in our society simply belong behind bars. Last night I was speaking to a Member of Parliament in Ottawa, and I'm pleased that this message also resonates there as well.

I have nothing but the utmost respect for our police services in this province. In fact, I'm friends with several of them in Calgary. Along these lines I'm happy to see our continued commitment to enforcement. Last year this government announced a province-wide increase of 300 police officers, many of whom were directly assigned to the role of targeting gang activity. Since police officers are on the front lines defending our communities from crime, funding and supporting them is the greatest step we can do to combat gang activity in our province. I applaud this government's previous actions for targeting crime and commend its forward-thinking and modern strategy to continue commitment to safe, strong, and secure communities, Mr. Speaker.

But there is more to be done now and in the future. There is another equation upon how we must work as a government, and

that's tackling the financial proceeds of crime. During the previous session, Mr. Speaker, I was proud to support Bill 50, the Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Act. This piece of legislation was specifically crafted to hit criminals where it hurts, in their wallets. Bill 50 now allows courts to seize and sell any property or asset that was used during the crime, including items such as vehicles, cash, or even houses, the proceeds of which go to the victims of crime fund. By targeting the things that criminals value most, the impetus for most crime being money, we are sending a clear message that criminals and criminal behaviour will not be tolerated in our communities.

In this way, Mr. Speaker, I find it most uplifting that in the Lieutenant Governor's speech is the continued commitment that this government has to preserving the safety of our society. Along these lines I look forward to the opportunity to support further legislation aimed at halting gang activity, including forthcoming amendments to the Gaming and Liquor Act as well as regulations assessing vehicle modifications made primarily for gang-related purposes such as bulletproof windows on a car.

It is almost impossible, Mr. Speaker, to talk about crime without mentioning the illegal drug trade, and I recognize that the purchase of illegal drugs fuels crime and that the fewer people who consume these substances, the less money is in the hands of organized crime. That's why as a member of this Assembly I'm proud to support the Alberta Adolescent Recovery Centre, located in Calgary-Egmont, where I have attended. I also know there are other supporters here. I saw the Member for Calgary-Glenmore there this summer as well as the previous Member for Calgary-Egmont, Mr. Denis Herard, who introduced me to the centre. This centre has graduated over 400 people that have suffered from substance abuse addictions. Along these lines it is noteworthy that the safe communities initiative includes support for programs for addiction recovery projects, something that goes hand in hand with crime.

Mr. Speaker, we must also not forget that it's not just today's people who benefit from getting a handle on crime in our province. This came to mind last Friday, when I had the pleasurable occasion to speak to Ms Dawn McGuckin's grade 6 class at St. Matthew school in Calgary-Egmont. By getting a handle on crime, it hit me that this generation will also benefit.

Mr. Speaker, I built my dream in Alberta, and I often think of what a privilege it is to be an Albertan and a member of this Assembly. As His Honour said yesterday, "We must continue to welcome people to Alberta to pursue their dreams and build our communities." My vision of this province is one where future generations can walk the same streets today in pride and free from fear. I know our government shares this vision, and I'm pleased to support this throne speech.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To my hon. colleague. It's been nearly a year since you've been elected. What one insight of humanity would you say that you have really uncovered in this past year?

Mr. Denis: That's quite a broad question. I want to thank the Member for Calgary-Montrose. One thing that I've realized is how much this Assembly and everything we do, regardless of our partisan affiliation, actually affects people outside this Chamber, whether or not they know or appreciate it. All of us regardless of our partisan stripes should realize just the gravity of our actions in this province.

The Speaker: Additional questions? Participants?

Then the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great honour to rise today on behalf of the constituents of Bonnyville-Cold Lake to address this Assembly in response to the Speech from the Throne. This past year the government has been working very hard to meet the needs of Albertans, and I've been working very hard to ensure that the constituents of Bonnyville-Cold Lake remain a priority of this government.

For the last three decades I've called my constituency home. I raised two children there. I helped raise other people's children there. As a former teacher in Bonnyville I know that it truly takes a village to raise a child, and in this case it takes a province. It takes a province to provide the services that each resident is in need of, it takes a province to encourage the growth and development of its population, and it takes a province to provide opportunities for all. Mr. Speaker, this government has done all of these things for Albertans, and it's imperative that it continue to do so.

I can identify the issues that are of concern to my constituents, and I'm confident that our government is able to make these concerns a priority. The uncertainty of the global economy is not only a concern for the people of my constituency but for all Albertans. It is my hope that this government's action plan will act to preserve the state of industry and help to continue to experience growth in and outside the province.

Mr. Speaker, my constituency is a major hub of industry in Alberta. There are major oil production facilities in Bonnyville-Cold Lake: Shell, Husky, CNRL, EnCana, Imperial Oil, and Devon. It is home to an overwhelming majority of workers from these companies. In my constituency we count on industry, and industry counts on us. It is a codependent relationship of growth, and this relationship is crucial to the future development of Bonnyville-Cold Lake. The major issue that gravely affects my constituency is how this industry is affecting our land, the land that farmers need to grow our food and herd our cattle, the land that farmers need to provide for their families and ours. I am glad that we are taking the necessary steps forward to protect and maintain the family farm.

As a rural population the people of Bonnyville-Cold Lake rely on these resources to generate revenues, revenues that we can put back into the constituency to provide the services that our residents need each day. We need industry, but we do not want to see our beautiful landscape fade away. I am confident that this government has taken these interests to heart and will continue.

Over the last few years government has developed several ways of reducing our impact on the environment. Carbon capture technology is the most dominant. Through my position as co-chair of the Alberta Energy Research Institute I believe that research is a very important part of this progress. It is needed to develop new and innovative ways to not only extract resources but to reduce the impact of this extraction on our environment. This preservation of land is a fundamental priority for the people of my constituency and for all Albertans. It is important for us to give future generations an opportunity to experience the beauty of Alberta. Mr. Speaker, opportunity is something we value tremendously in this province. It's something that we are very fortunate to have a lot of. It attracts people from all over the world who are in search of a better quality of life.

The First Nations and Métis settlements in Bonnyville-Cold Lake are in need of this opportunity. A few months ago two constituents approached me about supporting a business proposal that they had created for their community. They wanted to start up an agency that would train First Nation and Métis people in Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

They would help them develop the skills necessary to become more active in the Alberta workforce. Mr. Speaker, it was an incredible idea. It would give this community a means to take advantage of the opportunities available to them. It's ideas like this that make Alberta unique. This government has always been there to provide support and encourage growth within our community, and it must continue.

In Bonnyville-Cold Lake another group that needs our support is the seniors. They make up a large part of our constituency. A few weeks ago the hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports came to visit the Cold Lake seniors. They were so appreciative of this opportunity to express their thoughts and concerns to the hon. minister. Providing seniors with the attention and care they need makes a world of difference to them. This government is committed to meet the needs of our province's seniors by improving quality and choice in a continuing care system.

5:50

We must also increase accessibility to essential services like health care for this growing part of our population. As a rural area we need to forge better connection between our residents and major care facilities like hospitals. This can be done by enhancing the emergency medical service in rural areas, which our government plans to do. There are two hospitals in my area, one in Bonnyville and one in Cold Lake. My constituents need to be able to get to one of them quickly in a life-or-death situation. We also have a problem with retention and recruitment of medical staff. It's imperative that we continue to improve the connection between our population and the services they need. Accessibility for all Albertans needs to be a major initiative of this government.

As a teacher for over three decades I know that our educational system requires this very same accessibility. Creating dialogue between students and teachers and parents will help to do this. It'll give kids the same opportunity that I had to receive a great education. The great education will help them establish a clear direction in life, inspire each student to meet their full potential. With increasing innovations in education, more doors are opening up for students to take advantage of. For this I applaud our education system. It is my hope that this province and government will

continue to support students by providing this opportunity and choice to them.

Mr. Speaker, all of these groups – seniors, students, industry workers, farmers, Métis, First Nation people, and many others – are part of my constituency, my community. It is a home to many diverse groups of people with different cultural backgrounds: French, Ukrainian, First Nations, Métis. As a woman of Ukrainian ancestry I believe that culture is a huge part of who you are and how you interact with others. It is important for our government to foster this culture through participation in events like Arts Days. These events bring communities together to create strong, vibrant municipalities, and these sustainable municipalities are needed to create strong, vibrant communities.

Cold Lake is experiencing difficulties maintaining its sustainability. It is such a diverse population in need of different services and support from this government. I'm committed to improving this sustainability because communities like Cold Lake are everything to Albertans. My community is everything to me, and I will continue to fight for it in any way that I can to ensure that their needs are being met each and every day, to ensure that they have every opportunity available to them.

Mr. Speaker, this government, this province, is a part of a community, and when this community is challenged, we must stick together to ensure stability, growth, and sustainability.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Are there additional participants this afternoon?

If not, I'll recognize the hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What an inspiring first day of great debate in this House on many, many valuable points that we should all reflect on. That having been said, I would move that the Assembly now stand adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:54 p.m. to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

Table of Contents

Wednesday, February 11, 2009

Introduction of Guests	7, 20
Members' Statements	
Alberta Initiative for School Improvement	8
Charles Darwin's Birthday Bicentennial	8
Voter Participation	8
International Disability Film Festival	8
EarthRenew Manure Processing Facility	9
John Kucera	9
Introduction of Bills	
Bill 2 Lobbyists Amendment Act, 2009	9
Bill 3 Credit Union Amendment Act, 2009	17
Bill 4 Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2009	17
Bill 5 Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2009	17
Bill 6 Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Amendment Act, 2009	18
Bill 7 Public Health Amendment Act, 2009	18
Bill 8 Feeder Associations Guarantee Act	18
Bill 9 Government Organization Amendment Act, 2009	18
Bill 10 Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act	18
Bill 11 Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2009	19
Bill 12 Surface Rights Amendment Act, 2009	19
Bill 13 Justice of the Peace Amendment Act, 2009	19
Oral Question Period	
Global Economic Downturn	9, 11
Health Care Spending	10
Provincial Budget Release	10
Employment Supports	11
Pharmaceutical Benefit for Seniors	12
Infrastructure Spending	12
Swan Hills Treatment Centre	12
Temporary Foreign Workers	13, 16
Environmental Charges against Syncrude	13, 16
Job Creation	14
RCMP Traffic Enforcement Duties	14
Public-private Partnerships for School Construction	15
Air and Water Quality of Industrial Development	15
Ambulance Services	16
Tabling Returns and Reports	19
Tablings to the Clerk	20
Government Motions	
Committee Membership Changes	20
Consideration of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech	21

COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mrs. Forsyth

Deputy Chair: Mr. Elniski

Blakeman	DeLong	Johnston	Notley
Campbell	Denis	Kang	

Standing Committee on Community Services

Chair: Mr. Doerksen

Deputy Chair: Mr. Hehr

Benito	Johnson	Lukaszuk	Rodney
Bhardwaj	Johnston	Notley	Sarich
Chase			

Standing Committee on the Economy

Chair: Mr. Campbell

Deputy Chair: Mr. Taylor

Allred	Marz	McFarland	Weadick
Amery	Mason	Taft	Xiao
Bhullar			

Standing Committee on Health

Chair: Mr. Horne

Deputy Chair: Ms Pastoor

Dallas	Notley	Quest	Taft
Denis	Olson	Sherman	Vandermeer
Fawcett			

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Mitzel

Deputy Chair: Mr. Lund

Bhullar	Horne	MacDonald	Notley
Blakeman	Lukaszuk	Marz	Webber
Campbell			

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Kowalski

Deputy Chair: Mr. Oberle

Elniski	Leskiw	Rogers	VanderBurg
Fawcett	Mason	Taylor	Weadick
Hehr			

Standing Committee on Private Bills

Chair: Dr. Brown

Deputy Chair: Ms Woo-Paw

Allred	Boutilier	Jacobs	Rodney
Amery	Calahasen	MacDonald	Sandhu
Anderson	Dallas	McQueen	Sarich
Benito	Doerksen	Olson	Taft
Bhardwaj	Forsyth	Quest	

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Mr. Prins

Deputy Chair: Mr. Hancock

Amery	Forsyth	Mitzel	Sherman
Berger	Johnson	Notley	Stevens
Calahasen	Leskiw	Oberle	Taylor
DeLong	Liepert	Pastoor	Zwozdesky
Doerksen	McFarland	Rogers	

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Mr. MacDonald

Deputy Chair: Mr. Quest

Benito	Denis	Johnson	Sandhu
Bhardwaj	Drysdale	Kang	Vandermeer
Chase	Fawcett	Mason	Woo-Paw
Dallas	Jacobs	Olson	

Standing Committee on Public Safety and Services

Chair: Mr. VanderBurg

Deputy Chair: Mr. Kang

Anderson	Cao	MacDonald	Sandhu
Brown	Jacobs	Notley	Woo-Paw
Calahasen			

Standing Committee on Resources and Environment

Chair: Mr. Prins

Deputy Chair: Ms Blakeman

Berger	Griffiths	Mason	Oberle
Boutilier	Hehr	McQueen	Webber
Drysdale			

If your address is incorrect, please clip on the dotted line, make any changes, and return to the address listed below. To facilitate the update, please attach the last mailing label along with your account number.

Subscriptions
Legislative Assembly Office
1001 Legislature Annex
9718 - 107 Street
EDMONTON AB T5K 1E4

Last mailing label:

Account # _____

New information:

Name _____

Address _____

Subscription information:

Annual subscriptions to the paper copy of *Alberta Hansard* (including annual index) are \$127.50 including GST if mailed once a week or \$94.92 including GST if picked up at the subscription address below or if mailed through the provincial government interdepartmental mail system. Bound volumes are \$121.70 including GST if mailed. Cheques should be made payable to the Minister of Finance.

Price per issue is \$0.75 including GST.

On-line access to *Alberta Hansard* is available through the Internet at www.assembly.ab.ca

Address subscription inquiries to Subscriptions, Legislative Assembly Office, 1001 Legislature Annex, 9718 - 107 St., EDMONTON AB T5K 1E4, telephone 780.427.1302.

Address other inquiries to Managing Editor, *Alberta Hansard*, 1001 Legislature Annex, 9718 - 107 St., EDMONTON AB T5K 1E4, telephone 780.427.1875.