



Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday, February 12, 2009

Issue 3

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.

Thursday, February 12, 2009

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Give to each member of this Legislature a strong and abiding sense of the great responsibilities laid upon us. Give us a deep and thorough understanding of the needs of the people we serve. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance and Enterprise.

Ms Evans: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. What a thrill it is today to introduce two French immersion classes from Campbelltown elementary school, which in fact is the first elementary school that was erected in Sherwood Park, in my constituency. The enthusiastic students today and visitors, including four parents, number 38. Thirty-eight are here with us. Teachers Annick Jean and Tandy Wilson are accompanied by four ladies, four moms, along with the class: Jennifer Kennett, Sandra Prior, Tanja Nelson, Sharon Midbo, and the wonderful students of Campbelltown elementary. What a bright class they are. I'd ask them to please rise so that we can show them the proper salute of the Legislative Assembly.

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

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you five postsecondary students from right here in Edmonton, four from Grant MacEwan and one from the University of Alberta. Their names are Laura Young, Timothy Smith, Jacquie Lycka, Daniel Larson, and Jon Mastel. They were gracious enough to join us for lunch and really had a lot of questions on what we're doing in Alberta around the environment and greening our economy. I'd really like to have them welcomed here with the traditional warm welcome from this House. Rise, guys.

Ministerial Statements

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

Oil Sands Development Strategy

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise and advise the Assembly that the government today announced a bold and visionary plan to guide the future development of the Alberta oil sands regions. The release of Responsible Actions: A Plan for Alberta's Oil Sands represents a significant milestone in achieving a comprehensive and co-ordinated approach in the continued development of this world-class resource. It is a part of a province-wide public policy framework that supports our plan for a growing and greener economy built around the Premier's commitment to deliver safe and livable communities for families and clear and realistic regulations for industry.

This vision looks ahead 20 years while taking into account the environmental, social, and economic impacts and opportunities of the oil sands. It reflects increased co-ordination across all levels of government and with stakeholders and signals enhanced accountabil-

ity in the management of this resource. Our strategy will work towards improving the quality of life of our oil sands communities and encourage innovation in science and technology. It will strengthen environmental stewardship and foster relationships with community organizations and the aboriginal communities.

Mr. Speaker, this strategy builds on the continuous efforts undertaken since development first commenced in the oil sands regions. It recognizes that, certainly, just like the challenges of development were very different 30 years ago, factors impacting development may change considerably in the years and decades ahead. This is a clear and realistic road map to the future. It will guide us in optimizing economic growth while reducing environmental impacts. It will increase co-ordination across all levels of government and stakeholders in developing this resource responsibly and enhance accountability. It will foster innovations that can solve the unique challenges of the oil sands development, and it will continue this government's emphasis on planning in high-growth communities in the oil sands regions.

With these improvements in mind we recognize that no major source of energy today comes without consequences. Our goal must be nothing less than to partner with our customers in meeting their energy needs while honouring our mutual commitment to protect our environment for future generations. I don't suggest that it will be easy. There will be some who will oppose this way forward, but we have faith in Albertans. The people of this province have faced together many challenges over the past century, and through tough times Albertans have learned the value of self-reliance, hard work, the need to plan and prepare for the future, and above all what it means to stand together.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to offer my thanks to everyone who worked on this plan for their efforts on behalf of Albertans. I am confident that through these responsible actions we can position our province for success in developing this unique resource, making the foundation for a prosperous and sustainable future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My pleasure to rise to the ministerial statement and acknowledge that this is the industry of the province. It's been the engine of our development. It has been an important part of the history and even the culture of Alberta. It has been one of the most controversial energy sources since I became a member of this Legislature.

Clearly, we have to learn from the past 50 years that the lack of planning has had a tremendous impact not only on this province and on this country but on this industry's reputation internationally. A plan is always welcome. A plan should have clear objectives, clear timelines, a clear budget, a clear set of outcomes. How else can we evaluate what a plan is to achieve?

Albertans have sought and demanded management of their oil sands. Former Premier Peter Lougheed has weighed in on the issue repeatedly over the last decade asking for leadership, asking for a plan, asking to include the social, the environmental, as well as the economic issues. We don't yet see a plan here, Mr. Speaker, and Albertans are reminded of the 1999 document through SREM that sounded awfully similar. So we yet wait in hope of seeing a concrete plan of action that respects First Nations issues, long-term water needs in the area, a commitment to climate change globally, and a different way of developing energy in this province. The industry itself waits in hope of seeing their reputation restored by a more sustainable and thoughtfully paced development in the oil sands.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, I suspect you'll be requesting an opportunity for your colleague to participate in this ministerial statement.

Ms Notley: That is absolutely correct.

The Speaker: That would require unanimous consent, so I'll ask just one question. Does any member object to providing an opportunity to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood to participate?

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you also to members of the Assembly. The strategy document, Responsible Actions: A Plan for Alberta's Oil Sands, that was released this morning by the hon. President of the Treasury Board is thin gruel indeed. Contrary to what the minister has told the House, I believe that this document is neither bold nor visionary. In fact, it represents more business as usual from this government.

1:40

There are six strategies identified at the beginning of the document, and I'd like to address some of them because I think it is a case of attempting to close the barn door after a number of horses have already escaped. First of all, the document talks about the development of the tar sands in an environmentally responsible way. It's a bit late for that, Mr. Speaker, given the government's rejection of hard caps on CO₂ and their failure to clean up the tailings ponds. The second one talks about healthy communities. Tent cities and cancer in Fort Chipewyan do not represent healthy communities. Number 4, proactive aboriginal consultation, is another horse that has left the barn. There are broken relationships with aboriginal groups, and their concerns around their own health have been ignored. Finally, it talks about developing long-term value for our resources. This flies in the face of the government's policy with respect to the export of unprocessed bitumen from this province and the job losses that it entails.

Mr. Speaker, we have called for a long time for a comprehensive plan for the development of the tar sands. This document, in fact, does not represent that type of plan and represents, as I said, simply more business as usual. Nothing has changed, and nothing will.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, you rose just as the Clerk rose.

Mr. Boutilier: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to ask for unanimous consent to be able to speak also, as a member who calls Fort McMurray his home, about the oil sands strategy as a member's statement.

The Speaker: Hon. member, this would require unanimous consent of the Assembly. I'll ask the question. Is there any member who would object to providing the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo an opportunity to respond? If so, please say no.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to all members of the government party as well as across the way. I came to Alberta 31 years ago from a farm in a small, rural community in Nova Scotia and have called Fort McMurray my home for the past 31 years. I've had the honour and privilege of serving those residents in the community of Fort McMurray and then the Wood Buffalo region as a city councillor, as their mayor, and of course now for almost the past 13 years as their MLA.

In Fort McMurray we pride ourselves on the fact that we call it home. We believe that there are many people across Canada and around the world and even here in Alberta who don't quite understand Fort McMurray. I want to say today that I thank each and every one of the members from all political parties who have taken the time to visit our home over the past number of years because of their interest in the oil sands but also their interest in so much that is going on world-wide relative to the oil sands. I also want to say that it's time, a challenge for all of us in terms of the fact that we have a plan.

I want to share this with you. Three years ago at the time when I was a member of the government and Minister of Environment, I went to the then Premier and asked him if I could intervene at an Energy and Utilities Board meeting, and I said I would resign as the minister to represent the citizens of my community as their MLA. He granted me that right, and I did. I shared with them at this EUB intervention the feelings of what citizens were saying.

At the time the Premier of the day made a comment that he didn't have a plan, and that really reflected what was taking place in Fort McMurray. I just want to say today that my wife and I are proud to have a 20-month old son. We breathe the air every day in Fort McMurray. We enjoy the river. There is much work to be done, but I believe that the actual plan that was talked about today is really about a road map of the future. It has to be a living, breathing document that will have to be amended, will have to be changed, but it is an important step in the right direction from three years ago when the government admitted that at the time it didn't have a plan.

This is a plan. Let us embrace it. Let us eliminate the rhetoric. Let us work together from all corners because at the end of the day the name-calling doesn't really matter. Let's not disenfranchise each other. Even more important than politics, let us do what is right for Albertans and for the people in Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, that we call our home.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Members' Statements

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

Calgary-Montrose Block Watch Programs

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I stand to recognize some people who have been instrumental in keeping Calgary-Montrose a safe and vibrant community. These are individuals that are willing to fight for their neighbourhood, so much so that they are willing to devote their own time to ensure that criminals are aware that illegal activity is not welcome in their community.

Mary Ryan is one of these people. As president of the Marlborough Park Block Watch her work with other residents and community partners has resulted in previously crime-ridden homes being vacated and kept clean, free of drugs and other illegal, illicit materials. Mary and her husband have even cut the lawns of residences so that they give the appearance of a vibrant community, and they have helped create a vibrant community. If she sees graffiti, she takes it off. If she sees garbage, she picks it up. Her proactive work has prevented these places from becoming crime-ridden once again.

Mary's dedication and success has inspired others in the community to become involved in the Block Watch program. Elaine Gordillo has been a similar leader in her community of Abbeydale. Mr. Speaker, while some people might find it easier to ignore crime's presence or pass the responsibility on to someone else, Mary and Elaine have shown that they will not ignore crime. Rather, they will be proactive about keeping their communities safe and vibrant.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am grateful to have such constituents.

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

National Anthem

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm a very proud Canadian and a very proud Albertan, and I'm very proud to sing *O Canada* in this Assembly every Monday. To me our national anthem stands for many of the great things about Canada: the beauty of our country, our principles of justice and democracy, the bravery of Canadian troops, who are willing to sacrifice their lives to preserve freedom.

I was very dismayed to learn that a principal in New Brunswick has discontinued the singing of *O Canada* prior to classes in his school. Some people claim that the lyrics to our national anthem are unfitting, are unsuitable, and they can contravene the rights of some. Nothing could be further from the truth. Canadian children should be encouraged to celebrate our country's values and pay tribute to the strength and vitality of our democracy. To ban *O Canada*, in my mind, is not only poor judgment; it's also disrespectful to those who have fought and worked so hard to make our great country what it is today.

I'm looking forward to joining my colleagues in celebration of our Canadian spirit in the Assembly again by singing *O Canada*. Our national anthem is a reminder of what Canada is, what it stands for, what it means to be a proud Canadian, and what it means to be free.

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

Statement of Appreciation

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to thank you, my colleagues on both sides of this House, and all the staff who extended their best wishes of good health to me during these past few months. I'm pleased to be back. [applause] Thank you.

I'm pleased to be back in the Legislature, and I wish to extend my sincere thanks to all of you who sent flowers, cards, chocolates as well as your prayers during these trying times.

I also want to thank the dedicated health professionals who saw to it that I'm able to fight another day here in the Legislature. Your individual and collective efforts were truly remarkable.

I also want to thank my beautiful wife, family, and friends for their love and support. These times would have been far more difficult without their help and compassion. It was great to have my grandchildren's love and warm smiles during the cold days of Christmas. My friends from Calgary-McCall and across Canada phoned me on many occasions with words of encouragement and support, for which I'm grateful.

I also wish to thank the constituents of Calgary-McCall who sent their best wishes to my office, and I look forward to meeting you at the doors this spring during my 2009 outreach campaign. With a strong and revitalized heart I am ready to resume my responsibility as your MLA and shadow minister for transportation and government services. My office staff have advised me of the pressures of layoffs, the need for increased social assistance pressures, the Calgary airport tunnel, the health and educational concerns of my

constituents, and the impact of crime and gang violence in our communities. With these issues in mind I look forward to representing the constituents of Calgary-McCall.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Official Opposition.

Oil Sands Development Strategy

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today the government released what it called Responsible Actions: A Plan for Alberta's Oil Sands. This report contains not one timeline and not a single costing. It is cosmetic rather than effective. To the Premier: how can the Premier call this a plan?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, Alberta is blessed with world-class energy resources – it really is a blessing – and I can assure this House and all Albertans that we'll continue to develop those resources responsibly to ensure that the next generation enjoys the benefits of that development, ensure that we protect our air, land, and water. We're going to do that by working with other Albertans, including the companies that are involved, and with those other interest groups that have input into the plan for the oil sands.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Premier again: how will Albertans know if the government has passed or failed without measures of success?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, one thing I can tell you that is done, especially in the community of Fort McMurray, is monitoring of air quality 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Ninety-eight per cent of the time the air quality in Fort McMurray is better than in any Canadian major city. That's one measurement. There's also the monitoring of water: since the early '70s, when the oil sands development began, daily monitoring of the quality of water in the Athabasca River. Once again, these are done by third-party individuals rather than government. That's the kind of openness and transparency we have with Albertans.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, after so many years of unmanaged development this document is profoundly disappointing. Is this all Albertans can expect to see for oil sands planning? When will we get something with real teeth?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, one of the first things that we did, with the support of Albertans, was to move a considerable amount of money into Fort McMurray, and that was not only into infrastructure, but it was supporting social programs. It increased the monthly allowance for teachers and nurses and doctors.

We also worked closely with the community of Fort McMurray to make sure all the services were there, to increase as more people moved into the community, and we continue to do that. The mayor is working very well with the ministers responsible, and I can see nothing but good things. The initial investment was 450 some million dollars and, again, the commitment of over a billion dollars for four-laning highway 63. That's a major commitment in dollars.

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The oil sands image is under fire across the world and with it Alberta's key economic engine. This is a serious issue and demands real action. The glossy vision document released today, Responsible Actions, fails to adequately address the key issues affecting Albertans and Canada. To the Premier. Albertans have seen many vision plans come and go; for example, the wetland plan of 2005, which still has seen no action to date. How can Albertans believe that something is going to happen?

Mr. Stelmach: Well, they have our word as a government that we're going to proceed with the plan. At the next election Albertans will check-mark; they'll measure our performance and also our commitment to the environment of this province.

For the purpose of Albertans watching here today, I did have a meeting with the hon. Leader of the Opposition. We had a very nice chat over – well, he had some water; I had some tea. We had a good discussion. I said: you know, I want to work together. We're in this together. I'm glad that he has recognized the importance of the oil sands not only to the future economic security of Alberta but to all of Canada. That's why we're going to work through all of these challenges together. As I said, it's all for the good of Canada as well.

Dr. Swann: Well, I was pleased to see, Mr. Speaker, that this document addresses the issue of groundwater risk. This is 50 years into the development. I would like to ask the Premier: when will the groundwater issues be settled?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, there has been a lot of advancement on the use of groundwater in the oil sands. Consumption has been reduced dramatically per barrel. Also, with the new technology coming forward, we're looking at how we can use CCS, carbon capture and storage, to extract resources, again, environmentally responsibly. That's why on behalf of all Albertans we're very strong proponents of whatever policy our federal government reaches with the American government. We have the money to invest in technology in this province, and we can share that technology with those other countries that are producing a considerable amount of greenhouse gas emissions and help them clean up the atmosphere around the whole globe.

Dr. Swann: Will the Premier admit that a plan to deal with the economic, social, and environmental issues relating to the oil sands was tabled in 1999 through the SREM program, sustainable resources and environment management plan, and received unanimous consent in the House seven years earlier, 1992? Will you or will you not manage the oil sands in the long-term public interest of Albertans?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, as I said before, we have made tremendous progress in the management of the oil sands. We have to remember that in the early '70s there were many detractors from the project that said: well, the resources are much too remote, and it'll take much too much money to extract the resources, so it'll never, ever go ahead. Yet there were those entrepreneurs, Albertans who put their money forward, invested a tremendous amount of money into research and technology. Now not only Albertans benefit from that investment but all Canadians. That's important.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Seniors' Pharmaceutical Plan

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government has more consultation work to do. Many seniors have contacted myself and expressed that they believe that serious changes need to be done to the seniors' pharmaceutical plan. Seniors have worked and budgeted for their retirement only to have the government change the rules that they had planned on. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: will the minister admit that the seniors who will be hardest hit by this change will not be low-income or high-income but the middle fixed-income seniors?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I stand by what I said yesterday, that some 50 to 60 per cent of Alberta's seniors will be better off with the proposed pharmaceutical program. In fact, many of them will pay absolutely nothing under the new program. This hon. member needs to ask seniors in her constituency who are on a very low income, who are struggling today because they have to pay a percentage of their prescriptions every time they go to the drugstore. Have her ask that question.

Ms Pastoor: That isn't actually who I was speaking about. I think I made it clear that low-income seniors will be looked after.

It's well known that living on your own can be almost twice as expensive compared to living as a couple. Does the minister agree that this plan could unfairly place a larger burden upon single seniors, most of whom could well be widows?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think the member should have a discussion with her new leader because we continually hear from the Leader of the Opposition that this government should be saving more and spending less. I think what the member is suggesting is that we cover all drugs for all seniors, and quite frankly that is not the policy of this government and, furthermore, hardly affordable.

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Actually, what I was suggesting is perhaps revisiting as you had indicated that perhaps you will do in your remarks from yesterday.

Will the minister commit to changing the pharmaceutical coverage for seniors to really reflect their contribution to Alberta and the economic circumstances that they face today?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, as with any government program when it's announced, we want to ensure that before we implement it, it is right. We have had significant input from seniors, suggesting things that they feel may not be fair. I have asked my department to take all of this input from MLAs, individuals that have written to me, and others to ensure that we have it right. We have until January 1, 2010, to ensure that what we're bringing forward is in the best interest of Albertans.

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

Oil Sands Development Strategy

(continued)

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Albertans have been urging this government to start managing the tar sands properly for decades. The President of the Treasury Board released a sham PR document today that has the words "responsible" and "plan" in the

title, but that's where it ends. The real title should be Look Busy: Obama's Coming and We're in Trouble. This question is to the Premier. Why won't you level with Albertans and admit that this so-called plan is just window dressing to placate world opinion?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, as I've said before, what was made public today was a very responsible environmental and production plan for the oil sands. I reaffirm the position we've taken as government on behalf of all Albertans, that this is of mutual benefit to Albertans to develop their resources responsibly but, as well, ensure that future generations enjoy the benefit of this resource. It is a blessing. Let's work together to ensure that we develop it responsibly, and we will have a kind of quality of life that we can offer to the next generation as well.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I know it does have "responsible" in the title, but that doesn't make it so.

Plans set directions, and it's even more obvious today that this government has none. Page 26 of the report talks about leveraging bitumen to develop value-added, upgraded products, yet the same page says that you will encourage more pipelines to new markets. What's missing is a commitment to stop pipelines from shipping our raw bitumen out of the country. To the Premier: why did your leadership campaign promise this if you have no intention of doing it?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we are committed to adding more value to bitumen in the province of Alberta. It is long-term jobs, and quite frankly it's a wealth creator that will pay for many of the programs we enjoy. What I don't understand from the leader is that he first said Obama doesn't want the oil, yet the President is accepting the oil. I'm not quite sure where this oil has been going if it's leaving Alberta. Again, we have to work together to resolve some of the issues, to improve the image. We're doing that with the industry. We're doing that through focus groups not only in Alberta but in Canada and other countries because we do need a significant investment from other jurisdictions to help grow the oil sands. On the other hand, it's very difficult to do when in this very same room, in this Legislature day in and day out they keep trying to drag down the province through those kinds of comments.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When this government shows a clear commitment to cleaning up the tar sands, capping emissions, and making sure that our jobs stay in Alberta, then he can count on our support. Until then, no.

Mr. Speaker, it's impossible to enforce measures when there are no means to enforce them in the report. My question is again to the Premier. Why don't you set meaningful goals, such as cleaning up the tailings ponds in a relatively short period of time or putting hard caps on CO₂ emissions, with clear performance measures in place so your government can be held accountable for its performance?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, again I just saw a complete disconnect from reality. There are 3 and a half million people in the province of Alberta. He wants Albertans – Albertans – to shoulder all of the blame, whatever it is, for greenhouse gas emissions and not look to the fact that 75 per cent of the emissions coming out of the States are coming from coal-fired generation. He wants us to pay for it? I don't think so. Let's get serious about this ongoing problem.

The other thing – sorry, Mr. Speaker, to get going on this. However, let's invest in technology. Taking money out of the province, sending it to other countries in a kind of a wealth transfer – oh, by the way, giving the exchange . . . [interjection] Just selling the credits – remember, it's got to go through some authority – not able to even set the level of those credits. We're going to give it to the same bandits that put us into this economic recession? That's what he wants.

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

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to say that today our government released a document called Responsible Actions: A Plan for Alberta's Oil Sands. My first question is to the President of the Treasury Board. Can the minister advise the Assembly what impact this plan will have on oil sands development?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, the oil sands development that's under way has been ongoing for 40 years. The oil sands development, in all fairness, is really just getting started. What we need to send is a message to the other provinces that are at that trade show today from all across this country. They're looking for business in Alberta. To the people in Wisconsin building the shovels and the people in Mexico building the Terex trucks, that count on responsible decisions from Alberta, this document says that we're going to develop this resource responsibly. Regardless of who wants to hang banners in Ottawa or Washington, it's our resource. It will be done responsibly environmentally. These provinces are here to share in that end of things.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, that's great news.

My next question is to the Minister of Finance and Enterprise. Given the current economic situation and deferral of so many energy projects, are continued oil sands developments still viable?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, as cited by the hon. President of the Treasury Board, at least 600 visitors from all across North America believe so. They were there last night at the trade show and at the national buyer-seller forum to take part in some \$15 billion worth of maintenance activity, maybe as much as \$18 billion worth of maintenance activity that will be happening in the oil sands even as we have this business of slowing down because of the world economy. Many of the industries that were present were really captured by the thought that speakers like Mr. Southern expressed to them: this is a time to hold onto your dreams, to vision what can be, to work towards those targets. And they're so engaged.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you. My final question is to the same minister. Given the importance of the oil sands and energy resources, what measures is government taking to ensure that Albertans are receiving optimal value for them?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, in December my colleague the Minister of Energy released the provincial energy strategy, which cited the first ever bitumen royalty in kind policy, which will be the sponsor of much of the value-added refining and upgrading, which will in fact be part and parcel of the extension of the new Alberta frontier of economic development. So what have we started? We've started a way to manufacture and to follow through on the promise of our Premier to take bitumen to a whole new level, to be the manufacturing centre for pharmaceuticals, chemicals, and many other commodities that are needed right in Alberta and in Canada.

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

Provincial Budget Release

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the finance minister stated that the budget will not be released this month and that the minister did not feel that delaying the budget would “breed any disrespect or lack of confidence among Albertans.” Well, many Albertans are upset with the delay, and the only way to instill confidence, in my opinion, is to be honest with people about what’s going on. I will ask the Minister of Finance and Enterprise again: when will she release the budget?

2:10

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, there’s been a grand tradition of not announcing the date for the budget until one is prepared to table the budget and is fully apprised of it. I think our Premier spoke quite eloquently to the fact that we were waiting for, first of all, the federal budget, which came later than we anticipated, in January, that we’re waiting to see where we’re at with the American public under the new President in terms of all of the planning and the kinds of impacts it might have on our energy sector. In many parts of Canada the third leg of the tax stool, if you will, is a provincial sales tax. Here we are heavily dependent on that third leg being the revenue from energy resources. Isn’t it responsible for all Albertans to know what we expect those to be? That, in effect, is the best reason for not tabling a budget today.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I’m wondering which of those three legs the minister has to stand on, quite frankly.

Since she herself has experienced the constraints of waiting for the federal budget before she could complete her own – and I don’t know if she’s even started yet – why is she now putting those same constraints on cities, towns, rural municipalities, universities, nonprofit and other private-sector companies, school boards unless there’s something to hide or at least avoid as long as possible?

Ms Evans: You know, Mr. Speaker, I think our Premier has established a tone of mutual respect in this Assembly, and I think that’s an important and very valued commodity. We respect that people out there are waiting for budget targets, but it’s not unusual for people in the kind of economy that we’re faced with today to take a second look at budget, to take a look at spending targets, to take a look at all of those revenue streams that might feed into the budget. It hasn’t stopped anything. In fact, not one Albertan has written to me to say: table the budget today; table the budget tomorrow. The only place I’m hearing it is from the opposition and in questions from the media. We will table it in due course when we’re ready.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, that is probably because they’re too busy standing in line at the bank to pay their bills.

Can the minister explain why, in a time when markets are responding to people’s fears over uncertainty, this government continues to perpetuate that uncertainty by refusing to provide any details on the release of the budget?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, throughout the fall we’ve been engaged in business planning processes. Every minister and every MLA has consulted with people in their sectors, in their communities, in their constituencies. They have determined what the policies and priorities are. I think it’s been clear that we won’t spend as much,

no doubt, this year as we did last year in some capacities. We are looking very carefully at expenditures, at revenue streams. We’re trying to get it right. When oil prices change by \$16 U.S. per barrel per day, isn’t that reason to pause and reflect on how we can do it as well as possible? We’re releasing the information that Albertans need today. When we’re ready tomorrow, we’ll release the more detailed coverage.

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

Highway Construction in the Oil Sands

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For the Minister of Transportation. The economic growth of Alberta’s oil sands region is dependent on the ability of goods to get to Albertans living in those areas of the province. It’s equally important that Albertans are able to travel safely on the highways and the roads in those regions. My question: what is your department doing to ensure that Albertans and Alberta businesses have the safe roads that they need in the oil sands regions?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, as we speak and from last year on, we’ve got more than \$600 million of road projects going on in the oil sands region near Fort McMurray. Among other things, that included the first 16 kilometres of twinning that opened last fall south of Fort McMurray, from highway 69 to south of highway 881, at a cost of about \$53 million. We also did the initial grading work on major interchanges on highway 63 at Thickwood Boulevard and Confederation Way, an estimated cost of about \$300 million. Construction also continues on the \$127 million five-lane bridge across the Athabasca River. We also opened 17 kilometres of highway 63 twinning north of Fort McMurray last year at a cost of \$80 million.

Mr. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: these projects may be addressing the immediate transportation concerns in the region, but can the minister highlight any initiatives his department is pursuing to make certain that future transportation needs are met in a timely and effective manner?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, we’ve got road projects planned throughout the regions, also with Peace River, Cold Lake, Wood Buffalo, and beyond that. For example, we’re in the initial planning stages for a future east-west connector road that would connect Fort McMurray to the northeast with Peace River in northwestern Alberta. We realize the north is our future. These are the kind of long-range planning projects that we’re looking at now to meet our future transportation needs within the Wood Buffalo region.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. Safety on Alberta’s roads is imperative with my constituents, particularly highway 63, and with the recent rash of accidents there, it is a big concern. With the negative stigma that’s currently placed on that highway, what’s the minister planning to ensure that Albertans are safe when travelling that particular highway and highways to and from the oil sands?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, as you know, safety is a very, very high concern within our ministry. One of the most important safety improvements to the oil sands region that we’ve done is pave highway 881, which allows another alternative safe route. We’ve

also increased our highway maintenance and the number of snow-plows that are working on highway 63. The provincial sheriffs and the RCMP officers have also increased enforcement along highway 63 to keep speeds down. Last month in one day they gave out 255 tickets. I'd please urge everyone to drive safely, pay attention, use defensive driving, and drive according to the conditions.

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

Carbon Emissions Reduction

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. U.S. President Obama has campaigned and been elected on an energy plan weighted toward reducing carbon emissions and investing heavily in renewables and a green economy, and this new reality has serious consequences for Alberta. My questions are to the Minister of Environment. The President and the Prime Minister are beginning the process of a North American cap and trade system. Is Alberta planning to take its usual tactic and opt out of a national system to reduce emissions?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to report to the member that Alberta, in fact, is working with the federal government and is very much looking forward to our opportunity to engage with the new U.S. administration to talk about the need for a North American strategy with respect to climate change. We have to have a North American strategy because Alberta simply can't go it alone.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Well, thank you very much. Again to the same minister. Given that the Americans expect specifics and will not just accept a \$25 million PR plan . . .

Mr. Mason: Or talk.

Ms Blakeman: . . . or talk, is the minister telling us that he's going to expand the Alberta cap and trade program into a national system, or is this just a general discussion? What exactly are you going to do to reduce absolute carbon emissions?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, in the member's preamble she referred to the need for investment in technology, and she identified exactly what the strategy needs to be for Alberta. We need to have a system that allows for investment in the technology here in Alberta, and how that fits into any kind of a cap and trade system really remains to be seen. Clearly, the Premier has indicated already today that we're not interested in a scheme that is going to be taking funds and flowing funds out of Alberta and not allowing us to make that much-needed investment in technology. We're looking for an opportunity for Alberta to be part of a North America-wide scheme. We're looking for an opportunity for Alberta to invest in the technology that allows us not only to solve the problems for Alberta but for North America.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. To the same minister: given that the oil sands have come under international scrutiny for their impact on the environment, what specific actions besides carbon capture, which so far is the only tool in your tool box, can the government use to improve environmental sustainability?

2:20

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, apparently the member wasn't around when I talked about the fact that in the first six months of our emissions management program we've already identified 2 and a half million tonnes in savings in related activity. But specific to the oil sands, because apparently she wants to concentrate on the oil sands, there are a number of opportunities for reductions in CO₂ that don't involve cap and trade, one of which is the emerging new technology for in situ production that is starting to find alternatives to steam-assisted gravity drainage. We're looking at ways of significantly reducing the amount of water, which in turn reduces the amount of steam, which in turn reduces the amount of heat that's required. So there's one very good example of how technology will change and the future will be different from what we do today.

Oil Sands Development Strategy

(continued)

Mrs. Sarich: Mr. Speaker, the land-use framework was released in December of 2008, and the plan for Alberta's oil sands has just been released. My questions are for the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. In an effort to create a greater level of understanding for Albertans, what is the connection between the plan for Alberta's oil sands and the land-use framework?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The oil sands plan is a welcome addition to our government's policy development process. It joins nicely with the energy strategy and the land-use framework, and the common denominator and the foundation for all three of those plans is that no decisions will be made about energy development without taking into consideration not just the economic consequences but also the environmental consequences and the consequences for Albertans and their communities. The land-use framework is about greening our growth, not stopping it. In the current recession striking that balance is important. The oil sands plan strikes that balance, and I'll take this opportunity to thank the minister and the others who contributed to that oil sands plan for striking the right balance.

Mrs. Sarich: Mr. Speaker, my second question is to the same minister. Today the opposition leaders appear to be concerned about monitoring and enforcement issues. Are these related to the oil sands plan or the land-use framework?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to answer that question. The land-use plan and particularly the regional plan will in fact be the implementation mechanism for the oil sands strategy. Its focus is obviously more than just oil sands; it's the rest of the lower Athabasca.

But I get the impression that the new Leader of the Opposition – I congratulate him – and also the old leader of the third party, who we congratulate on that, are not keeping up with things. They are concerned about tailings ponds. Well, didn't they read last week that the Energy Resources Conservation Board has just set out strict new guidelines going into the future about reduction of tailings ponds? The leader of the third party complaining about emissions: what other jurisdiction in North America, what state, what province, has actual caps and penalties for exceeding those caps? Only the province of Alberta and only because of this government.

Mrs. Sarich: Mr. Speaker, my final question is to the same minister. How will the government ensure that the goals and strategies identified in the plan for oil sands are being met through the lower Athabasca regional plan?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to report that the regional advisory committee for the lower Athabasca has not only been established and appointed; they had their first meeting in Edmonton last week. I met with them for dinner and spoke with them. I stressed the importance of their work, not just for their local communities but for the entire province and now in the recession for all of Canada, and I told them that the oil sands plan would be available in the near future. It's come even more quickly than I thought. I told them it would have to be an important information piece to inform their deliberation. Will that happen? I'm very confident it will. The chair of that regional advisory committee is Ms Heather Kennedy. Heather Kennedy played a key role in the development of the oil sands plan. The pieces fit together nicely.

Enforcement of Environmental Laws

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Justice minister did not want to discuss the enforcement and prosecution of Alberta law in this House although word on the street is that she has been musing about creative sentencing regarding environmental violations. But as today is another day, I will try again. Will Alberta Justice commit to amending the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act so that fines adequate to prevent industry negligence are levied regardless of whether the courts employ a tailored sentence or not?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said yesterday in this House – and I did at that time defer to my hon. colleague the Minister of Environment – I believe that question has been asked and answered.

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, to the Minister of Environment. Yesterday you said that current measures are adequate to hold polluters accountable and that one deterrent was that any incidents negatively affect the customers' and the public's perception of the way these companies do business. So I ask: what about the perception of Alberta's soft environmental rules?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, for anyone to suggest that Alberta has soft environmental rules, they're clearly not paying attention to what's going on here. The day that this incident occurred, the government responded immediately, began an investigation. The investigation has been under way – an investigation that I might point out had up to two years to come to a conclusion and came to a conclusion after eight months – came to the conclusion that there was reason to lay charges. Charges were laid. We take these incidents very seriously in this province.

Mr. Hehr: Well, anyone who could have concluded after one day with 500 dead ducks that something went wrong, so congratulations.

The federal government recently spoke about plans to introduce legislation that would significantly increase penalties into the multimillion dollar range for large companies that commit environmental crimes. Does the Minister of Environment support such an initiative?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, this minister respects the law. Appar-

ently, this member, who purports to be a lawyer, doesn't respect the law because in the law of the land in Alberta you need evidence before you lay charges, you need evidence to win a case, and you need evidence before you find someone guilty of a charge.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Oil Sands Tailings Ponds

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government's new directive for managing tailings in the tar sands is ridiculous. It outlines a plan for oil companies to come up with a plan to create a future plan unless, of course, they later amend the plan at which point the plan would be re-planned and a new plan would be created to see how the plan could be planned for the future. To the Minister of Environment: isn't it obvious that you're putting your friends in big oil before Alberta's environmental future when all your ministry does is make plans to make more plans?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, technology is constantly changing, and it would be pure folly on our part if we were to assume that the rules that were in place last year would be appropriate next year given the fact that technology is constantly changing. The objective that we have in Alberta Environment is to ensure that we push industry to the maximum, we push industry to improve the outcomes, to improve the standards, and above all to protect the environment.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, the ERCB admits that oil companies have done next to nothing over the last three decades to reduce tailings and reclaim tar ponds notwithstanding their promises to the contrary. How are they penalized for this? They're given more time to come up with plans for new tailings and absolutely no directive to clean up the old ones. To the Minister of Environment: how much longer will Albertans wait and how many more animals will be killed and how many more plans will be made before your ministry forces oil companies to clean up their 40-year-old toxic waste there now?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, the preamble is absolutely loaded with incorrect information. I won't use unparliamentary language because I'm sure the member didn't mean to be unparliamentary, but the fact of the matter is that she's just misinformed. There is a 40-year history of operation in that area, and for anyone to suggest that there have been no advances during that 40 years or that nothing has taken place over 40 years, they're either intentionally trying to mislead Albertans or they are terribly misinformed. The fact is that there are tailings ponds that are in their very final stages of being retired. There will be many more to come.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm just quoting from the ERCB's own press release, where they said that very little has been done and promises were broken by the oil companies.

Every day the tar sands create enough tailings to fill 720 Olympic-sized pools. Astronauts can see the tar ponds from space, and the rest of the world can see them on Google Earth. Your so-called plan completely fails to address the environmental disaster that has taken place over the last 40 years. To the Minister of Environment: if you can't clean up the current tar ponds, can you at least come clean with Albertans and admit that you're moving full speed ahead on tar sands development with no plan to undo the current ponds?

2:30

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, it's exactly the current tailings ponds that I'm talking about. If the member would care to know the facts, she would learn that at two of the original projects that are under way, there are significant advances in retirement of ponds. In fact, I believe it's Suncor that is in the final stages. Within the next 12 months or thereabouts the original pond will be completely covered over, and revegetation will be under way. So, again, misinformed or just not caring to learn the facts.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Oil Sands Development Strategy

(continued)

Mr. Prins: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I was very pleased along with many, I would believe most, Albertans to see the President of the Treasury Board release the oil sands strategic plan early today. Now, of course, the real work begins in implementing these important recommendations. My questions today are to the Minister of Energy. What role will his ministry have in implementing the recommendations of the Responsible Actions strategy?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, very clearly this is a government-wide plan. It's no different from the climate change strategy or our provincial energy strategy or, for that matter, our government's fiscal policy. Although there is one department that leads the initiative, we're all working together to coordinate our efforts and deliver results. My department and I have been involved in this strategy as it was developed, and as we move forward, we will remain at the table to help implement the recommendations.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Energy minister: given that he just released the provincial energy strategy less than two months ago, how would he respond to suggestions that we're seeing a lot of talk and not enough action when it comes to the oil sands file?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, let's not underestimate the power of the talk that is in both the oil sands and the provincial energy strategies. These documents set bold new directions and a long-term vision with specific deliverables for oil sands development in our province. At the same time, we're seeing real action such as the recent tailings ponds initiative from the ERCB, as has been mentioned, which proves that Alberta can do long-term planning and also make progress now.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. The Responsible Actions report refers to well-defined and stable regulatory structures as a key success factor. Again to the Minister of Energy: given the criticism that we may have heard about how the Energy Resources Conservation Board handles oil sands applications, what is he prepared to do to ensure the plan is successful?

Mr. Knight: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, I believe, as do the board and members in the ERCB, that there's always room for improve-

ment, and we continue to work with the ERCB to ensure that we're successful. That said, it's important to take a close look at how the ERCB has handled oil sands applications, particularly in recent years. They have included stringent conditions in approvals that respond to environmental protection, public infrastructure, impact on communities: all important issues. That is the ERCB operating as it should and considering the public interest.

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

Temporary Foreign Workers

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta workers in the construction industry and in the transportation industry are, unfortunately, getting laid off. My first question is to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. Why is the government going ahead to recruit foreign workers in these industries in these recruitment drives that are going on abroad when we have willing and able Albertans who are unemployed and would like the first chance at these jobs?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I indicated in the House yesterday, before temporary foreign workers are brought in to fill certain positions, the employer must advertise right across Canada to assure himself or herself that no Canadian can fill that particular position. It's only after that that they will receive a permit from the federal government to bring in temporary foreign workers to fill those particular positions.

Mr. MacDonald: Again to the same minister, Mr. Speaker: given that last month alone 129,000 Canadians and landed immigrants joined the rolls of the unemployed, why is the government now going to Essen and Leipzig, Germany, in early March, recruiting workers in the construction, hospitality, and transportation industries, when so many people not only in Alberta but across this country are unemployed?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, we need to reiterate the fact that our priorities are to Albertans first and to make sure that any Albertan that wants to work and is capable of working in a particular occupation will have that option. We also want to make sure that Canadians have the option of filling whatever jobs are available in the province of Alberta. But we need to also remind ourselves that we need to be very prudent and very flexible so that our short-term requirements will not impact our very long-term goals of making sure that we've got enough people with the right skills in the right places when we do need them.

Mr. MacDonald: Again, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister. Your priority is to drive down wages not only in this province but across the country.

Given that the total value of residential, industrial, and commercial building permits in this province is down over 35 per cent between November 2007 and November 2008, why are you going at this time to Germany to recruit more construction workers?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure that we're out in Germany recruiting construction workers. We're out there recognizing that we're very, very focused on responding to the needs in Alberta where we have experienced some shortages.

If I can use an example, in the health field we are still recruiting people to come in and fill the voids, that we all feel is necessary. We constantly hear of need for additional workers in our long-term care facilities, as an example, so we are targeting some of those individuals. The demographic work that is done across the world indicates whether there are people that might fit those needs, and those are the groups that we're targeting.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Oil Sands Development Strategy (continued)

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A key goal of the oil sands strategy released earlier today is ensuring that we're developing the oil sands resources in an environmentally responsible way. My questions are to the Minister of Environment. With over 40 years of development already under way why are you just now looking at putting rules in place to make sure these giant mines get cleaned up?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, as I've already pointed out earlier this afternoon, we're not putting new rules in place. The rules have always been there. What we're doing is recognizing that those rules can be stronger, and we're committing to make them stronger. We're putting in place a system we've identified as progressive reclamation that says that as new areas are opened up, the previous areas need to be closed in. That's how we believe we can increase and speed up the process.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: what kind of consequences will companies face if they don't clean up as they move forward?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, the most obvious is that we hold all the cards. We're the ones that make the approvals and issue the licences. If the expectations that we set down are not met, we simply don't issue the licences and grant the approvals. We have a number of other tools in our box that we're prepared to use as well.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: how will these new rules ensure that tailings ponds get cleaned up in a timely manner?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, one of the things that we envision in the area of progressive reclamation is putting benchmarks in place. The opposition members and other critics of oil sands development often point out to say: well, with no reclamation certificates obviously no reclamation is under way. Clearly, these are long-term projects, so one of the things we need to do is establish benchmarks and say, "After five years this is where you are; after 10 years this is where you should be; after 15 years this is where you should be," because clearly these guys just don't get it over here.

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

2:40

Graduated Drivers' Licences

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For some time now constituents have raised concerns about the number of drivers on graduated licences between the ages of 16 and 18 involved in serious accidents on Alberta roads. This is an important safety concern. To the Minister of Transportation: will the minister commit to revoking the graduated licence of anyone caught exceeding the posted speed limit by 30 kilometres an hour or more?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, with the stats we've done, we've found our graduated driver's licence program has been working very well for new drivers to Alberta, not just young drivers but anyone who hasn't driven for two years in Alberta. We're in the process right now of completely doing a full review: do we need to make changes or not to the graduated driver's licence? When that review comes in, I tell the hon. member that I will gladly let him know, share the information on what we should do or whether we will leave it the way it is.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are talking about young drivers here.

To the minister again: will the minister commit to restrictions on anyone holding a graduated driver's licence if they have more than three speeding offences under the 30-kilometre-per-hour ceiling under this probationary driving term?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, on our graduated driver's licence they couldn't even get three speeding tickets or they'd automatically lose their licence. They're only allowed seven points under the graduated driver's licence.

Mr. Kang: So will they lose their driver's licence if they get seven demerits? That's what you're telling us, sir?

To the minister again, Mr. Speaker. Changes to the graduated licence program have been talked about forever. When will we finally see some action on this?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, it couldn't be forever. The graduated driver's licence has only been in effect for a few years in Alberta.

I think we have a great system with our graduated driver's licence, and safety is a huge concern. Yes, the people he is speaking about are our most vulnerable and create the most accidents right now. That's why we have a graduated driver's licence, and that's why we're reviewing it.

The Speaker: That was 90 questions and answers today compared to the 102 yesterday. We're going to move on very quickly because we have a standing order rule about 3 o'clock.

Members' Statements (continued)

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

Outstanding Calgary-Mackay Constituents

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize the achievements of some outstanding Calgarians and Calgary-Mackay constituents.

Children and youth under 19 make up about 30 per cent of Calgary-Mackay's population. Eighteen-year-old Calgary-Mackay

constituent Jane Wu has earned Canada's top teen philanthropist in Canada's first national contest in December 2008. As a volunteer since she was 12, Jane has logged thousands of volunteer hours, including serving as chair of the Calgary Youth Foundation and co-chair of the Mayor's Youth Council. She has helped to raise tens of thousands of dollars for projects like opening doors rental subsidies for youth, a program which makes schools, churches, and community halls cheaper to rent for organized activities. Jane also received the Alberta great kids award and Calgary immigrant of distinction's youth scholarship in 2008. I am certain we'll be hearing more about this remarkable young Albertan in the years to come.

Ten days ago Alberta celebrated a golden moment when Kurtis Wenzel, a grade 12 student athlete at the Calgary board of education's National Sports School, won Canada's first gold medal in the youth men's 7.5 K sprint at the youth and junior world biathlon championships at the Canmore Nordic Centre. This is traditionally a sport dominated by the Europeans, and winning gold is quite a coup for Canada and Alberta.

Then members of Calgary's Hung Mon Athletic Club brought home one gold and one silver medal from the world cultural sports competition held in Korea.

Last but certainly not the least, Ms Sandra Rhodes, principal of Sir William Van Horne high school of the Calgary board of education, is the only Albertan who won Canada's outstanding principal award. Her partnerships with the community and parents as well as successful change and innovation have resulted in improved student achievement.

Mr. Speaker, it's my honour to have this opportunity to recognize and celebrate the accomplishments of these outstanding Albertans today. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Six hundred and fifty people are gathering in Edmonton over the next two days to learn about innovative strategies for the prevention and treatment of fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, or FASD. Over 23,000 Albertans have FASD. The social and economic impacts of the disorder directly or indirectly touch every Albertan.

That's why our government is funding community-based supports, research, education, and awareness programs to keep more babies from being born with this completely preventable disability. A cross-ministry team of nine ministries has developed and is taking action on a 10-year strategic plan for FASD. We're beginning to see the results, but we know that there is much more work to be done. The Alberta FASD Conference is just one of the ways government, community organizations, educators, health professionals, and families are working together to promote healthy lifestyles during pregnancy and give hope to those affected by FASD and their caregivers.

Mr. Speaker, I encourage all Albertans to learn more about the role they can play helping people in our communities who are affected by FASD and supporting the FASD 10-year plan by visiting the website www.fasd-cmc.alberta.ca. By working together our province will continue being a world leader in supporting people and families affected by FASD.

Thank you.

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

Delisting of Health Services

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Every now and again individual Tory MLAs slip and give Albertans a glimpse into this government's secretive agenda for health care. Last week the Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace mused to reporters about delisting health services that everyday Albertans need. Clearly, he spoke out of turn. The Premier's spin doctors quickly swooped in to distance themselves from his comments.

We've seen them try this song and dance before. During the devastating Klein cuts of the 1990s the government delisted eye exams, wart removal, and local anaesthetic for dental procedures, all to shave a mere tenth of a percentage point from the health budget. What happened? Private companies began selling insurance for the delisted services. The fee for eye exams rose 17 per cent in the first year. Lower income families were gouged, and the government looked the other way.

Last summer the government looked the other way again as the Copeman clinic opened in Calgary, providing medical services to those who are wealthy. Those who can afford it get premium health care services while regular folks wait in longer lines at greater expense to the taxpayer.

This government continually spins the yarn that our health care system is unsustainable and that it must change. However, study after study shows public health delivery of health care is affordable when properly prioritized. Poll after poll shows that Albertans want no part in the slow dismantling of the services that they rely upon. My party's most important contribution to our Canadian way of life is a public health care system that is accessible to every Albertan and every Canadian in spite of what his or her income might be. Mr. Speaker, it's the envy of the world. We will not allow this government or any other to take it away, and we'll fight against any incremental attack that this government has planned behind closed doors.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table the Social Care Facilities Review Committee's annual report for 2007-08. The report includes feedback the committee received during visits to daycares, women's shelters, group homes, and other facilities and is very invaluable in ensuring the provision of quality, appropriate services to Albertans. I'd also like to take a second to thank the committee and express appreciation to those who took the time to share their views.

Thank you.

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

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today we're one year from the opening of the 2010 Olympic Games. As minister responsible for the Alberta Olympic and Paralympic Secretariat I'm pleased to table the appropriate number of copies of the Alberta Celebrates Vancouver 2010 supplement that was included in today's *Edmonton Journal* and *Calgary Herald*. This supplement highlights our own Olympic legacy and informs Albertans about the various pre-Olympic events and also introduces and profiles some of Alberta's athletes, who we'll be watching and cheering for next February.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

2:50

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is in regard to the questions that I asked the hon. Minister of Employment and Immigration earlier in question period. This is from the Employment and Immigration website, and it is a calendar of events indicating that on March 3 the Alberta government will be in Essen and on March 5 in Leipzig, Germany, to recruit construction and transportation workers.

The second tabling I have is a letter that I have received from Alberta Culture and Community Spirit dated December 9, 2008. It is a follow-up from questions that were asked by members of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts on November 5, 2008. I would encourage all hon. members of the Assembly to please have a good look at this. It explains where some of our tax dollars are being spent.

Thank you.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of 10 reports from long-term care workers indicating specific instances of shifts that were short-staffed. One of these reports states that some residents did not get their breakfast until mid-morning, and care that should have been done in the morning was not completed until the afternoon.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the chair will table in the House today the appropriate number of copies of two letters dated February 10, 2009, from the members for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood and Edmonton-Strathcona advising my office of the resignation of the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood from the Standing Committee on the Economy and the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona from the Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund and the Standing Committee on Public Safety and Services effective February 12, 2009. However, I do believe that it requires a motion of the Assembly to in fact put this into place, and one would look forward to that.

Projected Government Business

The Speaker: The Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. According to Standing Order 7(6) I would ask the Government House Leader to please share with the Assembly the projected government business for the week beginning February 17, which is Tuesday because Monday is Family Day and a statutory holiday.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, it's my anticipation that we'll spend the bulk of Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday next week in response to the Speech from the Throne. On Tuesday afternoon day 2 of throne speech reply and under Government Bills and Orders potentially second reading of bills 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 could be brought forward.

On Wednesday we would proceed again with throne speech reply, and for second reading bills 2, 3, 4, and 5 would be available, and perhaps Bill 1 might be in committee.

Thursday, February 19, again predominantly in throne speech reply, but we might anticipate second reading on bills 4 and 5, committee on bills 2 and 3, and potentially third reading of Bill 1.

The Speaker: This particular message is essentially to three members: the hon. Government House Leader, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. As events transpired this afternoon, I received a series of seven notes with respect to a matter which, I think, after reading all the seven notes becomes very self-explanatory. So what I will do is later on this afternoon simply make a copy of the seven notes, numbered in the order in which they arrived here, I'll give you all a copy of it, and you can unravel the mystery over the weekend.

Orders of the Day

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.

[Debate adjourned February 11]

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

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of my constituents in Edmonton-Rutherford I am very pleased to join other hon. members in replying to the Speech from the Throne delivered by His Honour the Lieutenant Governor. Not unlike other speakers that preceded me, my focus is on the opportunities I see for my constituents as a result of the direction government has set out for the province and the legislative agenda for the coming session.

Seniors and others living on fixed incomes look for reassurance, Mr. Speaker, that government will protect them through difficult times. Postsecondary students are concerned about future career prospects. Families worry about the impact of potential job loss. Small businesses wonder how they will fare in the face of reduced consumer spending. So when I consider the throne speech, I look for evidence that the government is providing meaningful hope that families and communities will emerge not only intact but stronger from the economic circumstances we find ourselves in today. I submit that His Honour has made a very strong case in this regard.

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

We can begin by looking at the base we're starting from. Albertans have built the strongest balance sheet of any government in North America. We have no provincial debt, a strong investment portfolio, and more than \$13 billion in the sustainability fund and capital accounts to cushion us from deficit and sustain investment for future growth. We have the upper hand on taxes, with personal, corporate, and fuel tax rates among the lowest in the country. The elimination of health care premiums means Albertans and their employers have an additional \$1 billion to invest in savings, education, recreation, or other priorities. And let's not forget for a minute, Mr. Speaker, that we are in the midst of implementing a capital plan worth no less than \$22 billion over three years. As His Honour illustrated, prudent economic leadership, innovation, and most importantly the hard work and perseverance of Albertans have prepared this province to succeed in virtually any economic market.

For small businesses in my constituency, Mr. Speaker, one of the greatest sources of hope is the Alberta-British Columbia trade,

investment, and labour mobility agreement, known as TILMA. In addition to increasing the size of the marketplace in which small businesses operate, the agreement makes it easier to source skilled labour, attract investment capital, and in several sectors can be expected to reduce the costs of goods and services Albertans use every day. Alberta has established many strong and reliable trading partners internationally, that will ensure our province can rely on a broad range of trade and investment relationships. Indeed, global demand as well as the United States' urgent need for a stable and secure supply of energy present unique opportunities with respect to how we deploy and develop our most abundant natural resource.

The Alberta energy strategy outlines a clear path to position Alberta and Canada as global leaders in the supply of clean energy from both existing and alternative sources. It addresses improved innovation through increased investment in research, development, demonstration, and deployment of energy technology. Perhaps the best example of late, Mr. Speaker, is this government's commitment to an investment of \$2 billion in the development of carbon capture and storage technology. This has tremendous potential to significantly reduce not only our own greenhouse gas emissions, but, as I think was acknowledged a few times in the House today, it's especially important in helping to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions of developing countries.

In addition to adding value and increasing revenue from traditional resources, His Honour's speech highlights the very significant progress Alberta continues to make in diversifying our revenue stream. The development and nurturing of knowledge-based companies is critical to Alberta's ongoing success in the new global economy. A prime example of this attitude in action is the Alberta action plan for bringing new technology to market. As members will know, Mr. Speaker, the plan assists Alberta entrepreneurs in developing their ideas and creating products for consumer use. It builds on the strength of advanced technology we have developed in sectors like clean energy, information and communications, life sciences, and nanotechnology, using a wide range of co-ordinated actions that take place in the early stages of technological development, where the help often means the most.

As an example, small technology companies are now eligible for access to vouchers worth between \$10,000 and \$50,000 in order to help get their ideas and products to market. In addition, the Alberta scientific research and experimental development tax credit benefits all businesses in sectors that conduct research. The credit is worth 10 per cent of a company's eligible expenditures up to \$4 million for a maximum credit of \$400,000. This will be refundable for all companies.

For my constituents, Mr. Speaker, they need look no further than the capital region, home to one of the largest academic health centres in North America. Here in Edmonton researchers, clinicians, and educators are building knowledge capital that will form the foundation for Alberta's future economy. The upcoming health research strategy announced in the throne speech will guide Alberta's investment in health research and ensure that the knowledge that we're developing here at home links to measurable improvements in our public health care system.

Mr. Speaker, seniors in my constituency were also pleased to learn that Alberta's continuing care strategy will improve health and personal care service options for seniors and persons with disabilities by enhancing supports that enable them to live independently within the community. To many of my constituents that is the highest priority of all. The increased availability of home care, more supportive living options, and upgrades to long-term care are all very welcome news.

3:00

Not only is the government of Alberta providing essential social programs, but it's also protecting Albertans where it matters most, in their own communities. Mr. Speaker, last month I hosted a public forum on crime and safe communities in my constituency of Edmonton-Rutherford. The expert panel included two members of cabinet, the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security and also the hon. Attorney General and Minister of Justice. But much more than highlighting the government's safe communities initiative, such as the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act and the safe communities innovation fund, it was really the discussion that followed the presentations which impressed me most.

I say this because individuals and community groups who attended the forum left the hall not talking about where they wanted government to invest more money or how they wanted government to change programs. They left speaking and planning about how to use the components of the safe communities initiative to facilitate their work collaboratively in our schools and our neighbourhoods to improve community safety. They left believing, Mr. Speaker, that government had provided them with the tools and empowered them to determine their own solutions and to implement them with appropriate assistance. One way Albertans can get involved in initiatives such as this is through the safe communities innovation fund, a \$60 million fund which has been announced and is available for local organizations to pilot projects designed to improve community safety in their areas.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, I believe it was Napoleon Bonaparte who said that a leader is a dealer in hope. His Honour's address provides an inspiring mix of hope, realism, and confidence and a commitment to creating opportunities for the future, that we as members of the House can choose to model or not as we work through these uncertain times with our constituents.

Alberta's financial fundamentals are sound, the political will to adapt to the future is there, and most importantly the resilience and determination of Albertans is stronger than ever before. Let's make the most of it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if anyone wishes to comment.

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to join the debate today regarding this government's throne speech, ably delivered in the House by the hon. Lieutenant Governor on Tuesday. Unfortunately, while the delivery of the throne speech was able, the construction and substance of this government's blueprint is a deep disappointment to everyday Albertans concerned about the turbulent economic times we are entering.

There are four major problems with the government's stated approach to Alberta's future. Firstly, it doesn't acknowledge the serious implications of the current economic climate for Alberta's families and provides no vision for Albertans faced with the prospect of missing mortgage payments and struggling to provide for their kids. Secondly, it's premised on an outdated and backward-looking approach to building Alberta's economy. Thirdly, it maintains Alberta's position as the jurisdiction with the most ineffective environmental protection scheme in the developed world. Finally, it misses the opportunity to transition our province toward a truly renewable and green future. Any one of these flaws on its own is a matter of grave concern to ordinary Albertans. Combined they leave Alberta families with no hope that they will be able to ride out the economic storm we are entering.

This government seems to believe that if they don't talk about it, maybe it just won't happen. They acknowledge in words that Alberta is not immune to the economic crisis that the world finds itself in, but they do absolutely nothing to mitigate the circumstances. Mr. Speaker, Alberta had 5,700 job losses in January alone. In the two days since this session opened, we had 240 more workers given pink slips, with nothing more than expressions of regret from the Premier. Of course, those are only the ones that happened to be reported in the media. These men and women don't need the government's sympathy; they need a transition strategy. They need to know that their government has a plan to get them back to work in jobs that will provide for their families, that will not force them to look outside of Alberta for work or to have to rely on the social safety net or, as mentioned, resumé-writing classes.

Mr. Speaker, every forecast is that the situation is going to get worse before it gets better. Now, I'm not suggesting that we alone can stop the global economic downturn, but I am suggesting that if we don't admit that we have a problem and begin to use every available resource to address it, then the impacts of a bad situation will be far, far worse.

Mr. Speaker, the old ideas upon which the Tories are relying are the worst of their old ideas. The government plans to invest everything we have into maintaining Alberta's role as the nonrenewable fossil fuel dealer for the American oil addiction. Nowhere is this more clear than in the government's provincial energy strategy released last December, a document that clearly informed Tuesday's throne speech.

This government's strategy is flawed in a number of ways. For one, it assumes that Alberta will benefit from the U.S. administration's desire to gain independence from overseas oil importers, but at the same time it fails to discuss at all the risk that the U.S. will abandon Alberta's future oil exports on the basis of environmental costs. What this government refuses to recognize is that our biggest customer for our major retail item is not as sure that it wants it anymore. Mr. Speaker, even McDonald's was forced to sell salads when the market for Big Mac sales dropped off. The U.S. has said that they may not want our oil if it comes with a huge environmental price tag and will be working towards a system that demands less. All environmental arguments aside, this should put fear into the heart of the President of the Treasury Board.

This government's plan is for nonrenewable fossil fuel exports to be the primary focus of our investment strategies at least to 2040. Let me read directly from the provincial energy strategy, page 15:

For Alberta in the coming 30 years, no other activities will have the scale or impact of energy development. Agriculture and other sectors are important to Alberta and diversification is good for us, but energy's impact is pervasive. It is, and will be, our province's dominant economic engine.

Clearly, Mr. Speaker, inherent in this statement is the dismissal of the concept of meaningful economic diversification strategies.

Not only are diversification strategies being ignored, but the government plans to focus the education of Albertans to support this unsustainable vision. On page 17 of the Alberta energy strategy the government writes:

The energy sector has endured periods where it was not among students' top choices when it came to choosing careers. This is unfortunate and must be addressed given that Alberta's future will be shaped around energy. We need to bring more people into the industry at all levels in order to fully tap the opportunities in years to come [through our education system].

In short what this says is that this government wants to spend taxpayers' dollars educating young Albertans to take on a career in an industry with no long-term sustainability because that's what their friends in big oil want. What about what's best for Albertans and, in particular, for the young people of Alberta?

To further support this fossil fuel energy future they are seeking, they want Albertans to also consider adopting a reliance on nuclear energy. The environmental costs, the safety costs, and the exorbitant costs to taxpayers can't be defended. As well, they fail to note that the world's supply of uranium is set to run out a mere 10 years past their current planning window. In short, this government's vision is to have Albertans become even more dependent on an unsustainable economic plan. They are not only without vision; they have handed out blindfolds to their caucus with matching earplugs.

Now, the third concern we have is that the throne speech seeks in several places to characterize Alberta's efforts of protecting the environment as somehow "showing environmental leadership." Mr. Speaker, this is simply not true. Our environmental protection efforts are an insult to current Albertans and are the true debt this government will leave to future generations. As discussed today in the Legislature, we have no clear, identifiable, enforceable plan to clean up the current tar ponds. We have a greenhouse gas emission control strategy which is laughable when compared to the federal scheme, which is itself a black eye for Canada on the international stage. We have a regulatory scheme premised on self-policing and self-reporting, and we have a penalty scheme which has no deterrent effect and which might even turn into a tax writeoff for the affected corporations if creative sentencing becomes an element. Make no mistake: in the same way we are now paying for the infrastructure deficit left by this Premier's predecessor, this government's irresponsible environmental stewardship will be the debt that our children and grandchildren will have to pay.

Finally, the throne speech is bereft of new ideas or initiatives to face the growing challenges about to confront Albertans. Indeed, by my calculation the only component of the throne speech that had not already been announced to the public and/or discussed in this Legislature was the creation of a two-day arts festival in September. Art is good, but unfortunately the throne speech missed a very important opportunity of our time, and that is the opportunity to make an investment of resources, technology, and most importantly, political will into an economy based on renewable energy.

3:10

Again I quote from excerpts of the provincial energy strategy. It says that this government only recognized the potential for renewable energy to become part of our mix some time "this century," and doesn't believe it could replace fossil fuels "any time soon." Well, I have a news flash for them: renewable energy plays a significant part of energy use and production in a number of developed countries now. It is deeply disappointing to see the government so shockingly out of touch with this fact.

A recent report released by the Pembina Institute shows how it's possible, if we start now, to entirely replace coal from our electricity energy mix within 20 years. They aren't proposing some sort of knee-jerk, all-or-nothing, get-it-done-yesterday approach but, rather, a measured phase-in of renewable energies, but it is phase-in that has to start now with investment now. They believe in a full transition that can be made in 20 years, well before the end of the 40-year window that this government is looking at. Yet none of the inspiring and exciting opportunities that were identified in that report have found their way into the government's plans for the future.

By the way, Mr. Speaker, anyone who is in tune with the conversation throughout the world knows that we aren't going to have a choice in the matter. The world is demanding that we do our part to clean up the environment, and sooner rather than later we will have an economy that is based on renewable energy. The question is: do we wait until we're forced into it, or will we be leading the way?

Now, the added benefit to an investment in the transition to a

green economy, of course, is the massive job creation that comes along with it. In an economic climate where layoff announcements are becoming commonplace, wouldn't investment in real jobs that will take us into the future be a no-brainer? For instance, a recent U.S. study showed that the U.S. solar industry had the potential to create almost half a million jobs in that country by 2016, and these were in comparison to the 79,000 jobs in coal mining and the 136,000 jobs in oil and gas extraction.

The combination of no new ideas and their stubborn reliance on fossil fuels to the exclusion of all else means that this government insists on proceeding with what will likely go down in history as perhaps one of the biggest boondoggles ever: their \$2 billion investment in carbon capture and storage, slash, giving lots of money to their friends in oil and gas. Now, this plan was referenced in the Pembina report, but in so doing, it was clearly shown to be the most expensive option of those being considered, and this is within the context of most experts acknowledging that the effectiveness and the sustainability of the technology is not yet proven. At a time when money is short, the lost opportunity this scheme represents to Albertans is a cost that grows at exponential rates.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Speaker, the government's plan for Alberta as outlined in Tuesday's throne speech is very disturbing. It shows no innovative thinking, relies on the very, quote, the market will take care of us, unquote, economic principle that caused the downturn, and fails to take advantage of obvious opportunities that are under our noses; that is, when it recognizes that there is any problem whatsoever.

I fear that if this is all we have to offer, Mr. Speaker, everyday Albertans are in for a much rougher ride over the next several years than they need to be. All around us governments are acting to help people through their tough times. They are investing in new economies and creating real jobs for people so that they can make sure that their families' needs are met. The only hope this government offers, however, is that oil prices will rebound. Well, we've all seen how unreliable the markets can be, and it's foolhardy to rely on them for our answer.

Regular Albertans are looking for government leadership, and I suggest that it is time this government showed some. Thank you.

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

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to ask the member a question. During the 1990s there was an NDP government in Saskatchewan. This government allowed oil production around the Estevan-Weyburn area to keep on going. In fact, that's how it balanced its budget largely. I'm wondering how she feels about her own party's development of oil and gas when it is in power?

Ms Notley: I have no difficulty with the development of oil and gas, but they were not developing in the tar sands, and they were not doing that development to the exclusion of the rest of their economy. I would also point to Manitoba, where they have the greatest level of nonrenewable energy production ongoing.

Ultimately, it's a question of dealing with what we're faced with now, and what we're faced with now in 2009 is much different than what all of us were faced with in the mid-90s. There are threats to our environment. There is no tar pond the size of the city of Saskatoon in Saskatchewan, but there is one in Alberta. I would suggest that probably if the NDP had to deal with a tar pond the size

of the city of Saskatoon in Saskatchewan, they probably would have, but it hasn't been done here. We need to move forward dealing with the real, long-term environmental costs that our current strategy is creating because they are liabilities. On a balance sheet they are real and they will cost us and we will pay for them. The longer we wait, the more expensive it will become. So it's irresponsible to suggest that it's not an issue. That's my short answer.

The Speaker: Others?

Then the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Despite what I just heard, I still rise today with a renewed sense of optimism, vigour, and pride. I have pride in having the distinguished pleasure of representing the hard-working and industrious citizens of Calgary-North Hill. I have the pride of working with a diverse, passionate, and dedicated caucus, whose discussions and deliberations of the most challenging issues in our province today are done on behalf of their constituents with tenacity and humility, all along being mindful of a role as being good stewards for this great province for younger generations.

Our Premier is a man of extraordinary vision, someone who fails to fall into the trap of regressive thinking during challenging times. He is a steady hand at the wheel of the ship in turbulent times. When others retreat, he has the optimism to search for the light at the end of the tunnel, the beacon of hope that all Albertans aspire to. He has the dogged determination to push forward to establish this province's place in the new world paradigm when the negativity of others is enough to stop progress dead in its tracks.

On February 10, this past Tuesday, Mr. Speaker, people from across the world and this great country, including the hon. Premiers from P.E.I. and Nova Scotia, were exposed to the blueprint of this extraordinary vision, a foundation of moving forward that rests on the pillars of confidence, optimism, and strength. As always, His Honour the Lieutenant Governor delivered this vision with humour, dignity, compassion, and conviction, exemplifying what it means to be Albertan.

The new Leader of the Official Opposition is a very intelligent and compassionate man. Yesterday we were exposed to his different hallucination, which was full of pessimism, negativity, and uninspiring and unconstructive rhetoric. For an intelligent individual I find it puzzling that he referred to the current global economic situation as simply a

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.

I'm so disappointed on behalf of all Albertans and on behalf of my constituents that he thinks of Alberta as the world's gas station.

For a compassionate individual I also found his antihope message depressing and frustrating, and I think we've heard more of that today. His comments: "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 very deep level." Now, I would suggest to all members of the opposition that just the mere mention of the name "Obama" doesn't necessarily mean that you bring hope to all Albertans.

Then he went on to say: "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." I would suggest that we can and that we will if we work together. That's the attitude that Albertans want to see in their government, and it is in stark contrast to the Premier's Speech from the Throne that was delivered by the hon. Lieutenant Governor on February 10. Take the first few

paragraphs of the throne speech, and we'll see that contrast, phrases that reference individual Albertans as dreamers who see opportunity here, that talk about the collective Albertans that "will emerge from adversity even stronger than before" and that "face the future with confidence and optimism."

3:20

Well, I do understand the challenges and trials that have emerged over the last few months, and I express my sincere condolences to those that have been negatively affected by the global economic crisis here in Alberta and right across the world. While expressing this sorrow, I do so with great gratitude and appreciation. I will not apologize for the success of this province. Our wealth and security is not a circumstance of dumb luck. Such an assertion is an insult to the people of this great province, to my constituents, who have secured a bright future for this province through hard work, innovation, and sacrifice.

As we move forward in these uncertain times, we must face the challenges with unwavering confidence, a confidence that over the last 15 years of sacrifice and prudent investment has placed Alberta in the enviable position of being able to stay the course through tough decisions and sacrifices of all Albertans right across this great province in the 1990s. This was done by a vision and desire to create an Alberta where we don't have to sacrifice the wealth and opportunity of future generations to deal with the issues of the day. The current environment is proof that these decisions were tough but necessary. Where other jurisdictions are struggling to balance their budgets and provide services to citizens, debt service payments can have a real limiting effect.

In the last 15 years, particularly over the last several years, this government has been investing substantially in the infrastructure that Albertans demand. The current capital plan supports \$22.2 billion in capital spending, an average of \$7.4 billion per year, which is three times the average of Canadian provinces. In 2008-2009 this province, this government will spend over \$8.7 billion, or about \$2,460 per person, on capital projects, compared to just a paltry \$726 throughout the rest of Canada. While other governments are finally talking about infrastructure investment under the guise of economic stimulus, this government has been doing it because Albertans demanded it and because it's the right thing to do. Not only has this government made tough, prudent decisions and invested in infrastructure; this government has also been saving for the future. The sustainability fund helps protect government programs and infrastructure spending plans from unexpected drops in revenue, costs of emergencies and disasters, which sits at \$7 billion.

Now, I know that many Albertans today are very thankful for such a fund. The capital account, which currently sits at approximately \$6 billion, has allowed us to continue with our capital infrastructure plans. Again, at times when government revenue is not as stable and not as certain, we can continue on with our plans and not have to go into debt like so many jurisdictions, putting the burden of today's decisions on future generations.

The heritage savings trust fund: to provide prudent stewardship of the savings from Alberta's nonrenewable resources by providing the greatest financial returns on those savings for current and future generations of Albertans. As of September the value of this fund was \$15.8 billion, which is down from the end of last fiscal year, but as we know, there are some current challenges with some of our financial markets, and that's to be expected. This fund is not to be looked at over six-month periods. This is a long-term investment fund that will be there to benefit future generations of Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, I stand here today to suggest that we are in a position to take advantage of the opportunities that we have as a result of past prudence in investment, and our Premier has laid out a vision for

this: to place Alberta as a leader in Canada and across the world. This is a relatively new world, a new world of increased trade and investment, of the liberalization of trade and investment, an increased concern for the environment, and an increased focus on securing energy for quality of life and economic sustainability and growth.

Mr. Speaker, over the Christmas holidays I decided to do some reading and exercising at the same time. You might not be able to tell, but I did. I picked up the November issue of *Policy Options* from the Institute for Research on Public Policy. It was a postmortem on the federal election, and in one of the articles Charles McMillan, a professor of international business at York University, made these comments about globalization and in reference to the past federal election. He said:

Even a casual perusal of party platforms during the last election shows that most politicians are thinking in terms of the late 1980s or 1990s. Critical 21st-century issues such as education and training as a lifelong pursuit, broadband and Internet access, excelling in new environmental and energy technologies, demographics and immigration policies, and cultivating Canadian companies in trade and high technology so they can sell in overseas markets were not on the political radar screen.

Mr. Speaker, I stand here today to suggest that our Premier must have read this before he developed the Speech from the Throne and the blueprint for this year's legislative agenda because I believe that in the Speech from the Throne he addressed all of these issues, putting Alberta into the 21st century and into this new world, where we can be leaders, where people are looking to us. One could easily make the argument that the current economic situation is a natural consequence of this shifting new-world paradigm, a reality check to ensure that our decisions are prudent and account for the long-term sustainability of our fundamental natural, economic, and governance systems in society.

This current situation calls out for leadership, and through the vision of our Premier our province is stepping up to the plate. Our Premier has delivered a vision where we don't talk about the economy, the environment, energy in silos, where these are parallel issues that affect all Albertans, all Canadians, and everybody right across the world. He has set out an aggressive agenda to deal with breaking down trade barriers through the trade, investment, and labour mobility act. Such policies are examples of where this country and this world can go to break down the barriers to make quality of life for individuals that want to trade or practise their own profession in different parts of not just this country but the world.

3:30

Personally I have been fortunate to represent this great province at the Pacific Northwest Economic Region table. I had the great fortune to travel to both the state capitals in Oregon and Washington, and the message was clear that people see Alberta as an opportunity, a beacon of hope in this current economic situation. They see Alberta as someone to partner with. Our message is clear to them that we're going to do this in a way that's responsible to all citizens and to the environment.

On the environment part our Premier has shown great leadership, and to anyone who wants to argue that Alberta is not a leader in this field, I would suggest otherwise. The \$2 billion investment into carbon capture and storage is something that is unprecedented across the globe. [Mr. Fawcett's speaking time expired]

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Mr. Weadick: Well, thank you. I was just wondering if the hon.

member could finish what he was saying there. I was listening very intently, and I missed that last little bit. If he could just complete that for me, I'd appreciate it.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you. I appreciate that. I know that the Member for Lethbridge-West knows that I'm never at a loss for words.

I was just saying that this government has taken significant initiative on the environmental side. Carbon capture and storage: unprecedented investment. The regulatory system of capping greenhouse gas emissions for large industrial emitters: again, not one jurisdiction on this continent has done that. That's leadership, folks, and anybody who says otherwise must be dreaming. I don't know. I just don't get it.

You look at some of the energy strategies that have come forward: the recently released report on oil sands development, the provincial energy strategy. Weaving through all of those is the ability that we as Albertans can effect change through action, through harvesting our energy resources and making sure that they're valuable for others across this great globe in a way that's responsible and environmentally friendly.

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

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to thank my friend the Member for Calgary-North Hill – I got it right this time – for such an invigorating speech, but I wanted to ask him one question. Like him, I represent a largely inner-city constituency in Calgary. I'm wondering what he thinks about the government's safe communities plan and plan to deal with crime in our cities.

Mr. Fawcett: I think it's a very good plan. I think it's a comprehensive plan that deals with some of the major challenges around organized crime, that uses a number of tools. What I particularly like most about this government's plan is that it invests money in developing community-based solutions. I believe, unlike other members of this Assembly, that the government can't be everything to everybody and that security and safety in our own communities rests mainly as a responsibility in the hands of the people that live in those communities. We will do our part as a government, I believe, to support them in doing that. I think that if we can use what tools are at our disposal to assist them, we have a great strategy for making sure that people feel comfortable and safe.

The Speaker: Others?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West and then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to rise and respond for the 13th time to the throne speech. I want to say what a gift I think this is and how much I view my ability to represent the people of Edmonton-Centre as a great honour and also a great gift. It's a job that I enjoy doing, particularly because of the constituents that I represent.

Now, I am very fortunate in being able to represent the fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre, which, in fact, has the Legislature Building as part of it. We have some wonderful infrastructure in this constituency: a baseball park, the downtown area, Grant MacEwan College. We've got the beginning of the LRT; please, dear God, we get more of it. There are a number of wonderful places to visit in this constituency: the arts district, various recreational opportunities through the river valley park system. But, really, for me the most joyous part of it is representing the individuals that live here.

I, as always, have consulted my constituents through a variety of means to solicit their views on what they wanted me to bring forward and look for in the throne speech but also to speak about in response to the throne speech. I've had an additional honour in that being named a deputy leader, I've heard from people outside of my constituency and from across Alberta that also wanted me to talk about some things.

If we may, Mr. Speaker, I'm just going to back off to the 10,000-foot level and speak more generally about some of the issues that people have identified as being really key. I have to say that jockeying for first position are the environment, particularly water, and the economy. In fact, I think that's appropriate because the two things are very much tied together in this province. That is our legacy: trying to find that balance between where we put an emphasis on economic development versus our incredible natural environment.

I have been very amused and have taken great delight in listening to the last couple of days' worth of responses to the throne speech and listening to a number of the members on the government side talking about the fabulous sustainability fund. I recognize that most of these members are new to the Assembly, but I cannot tell you the immense satisfaction I take in knowing that, in fact, this was an idea that was developed and brought forward by the then Leader of the Official Opposition, Dr. Ken Nicol. At the time the proposition that we brought forward as part of our Official Opposition position was met with hoots and howls of derision, snorts of disdain. "Oh, my goodness; what a stupid idea," they all said. And here we are years later with newly minted backbenchers crowing in delight of exactly that idea.

Now, granted, there is a significant difference, Mr. Speaker. We called it a stability fund, and the current government calls it a sustainability fund. I'll admit that that's a significant difference. Aside from that, it's the Liberal idea, lock, stock, and barrel. You're welcome to go and check it out in any of our documents from the time. So I take some delight in that.

The second thing that I keep hearing about as I hear my hon. members on the opposite side make their responses to the throne speech is the plan, the great plans for the future that they see inside of the throne speech. Again, another idea brought forward, pounded forward every day by members of the Official Opposition. Where was the plan? Exactly what was the plan? Where were the performance measurements? How did we measure this? Day after day after day after day. Again, howls of derision, snorts of disdain. How dare we? If I've got the quote right, "Only a Liberal would want to plan" was the insult that was thrown back at us. Indeed, only a Liberal would want to plan. So I thank you very much for the accolades that have come our way indirectly from the members of the backbench when they talk about how impressed they are with the plan.

The environment and the economy. You know, one of the other things I've noticed is in some cases a sort of petulant demand from some of my hon. members opposite that the Liberals insist on telling everybody exactly what it is that we would cut from the budget. If we can't do that, then we should just put up or shut up, and since we can't put up, then the obvious should follow. An interesting idea, but I would have expected a bit more support, then, from those very same members for our proposal that was brought forward in Members' Services to get additional funding to help us do research because, to be honest with you, we're a little short-staffed on that side of things.

3:40

Two things I would like to improve but am unable to do so at the time. One is research support to help us be able to go through things like the budget documents and pick out those kinds of numbers or

those particular programs that we felt should go on a list of things to be reviewed and perhaps cut or eliminated. More than that, I'd like to get more information. I've been watching budget documents for 13 years now, and I have to say there's less information available in budget documents today than there was 10 or 12 or 15 years ago. I went back to '92-93, and the amount of information that was available in those budget documents is significantly more than what's available to us today. So when there's a demand and a little stamping of feet that they want to know exactly what programs we'd like to cut, I'd like to help them, but frankly that's very difficult to do. Perhaps they'd like to work on my behalf and correct those two oversights. We have seven research support staff now to do 24 ministries and five policy field committees, so that's a heck of a lot of work.

A couple of other pieces around the economy. I think it's important to point out – and I represent a lot of small businesspeople in downtown Edmonton – how important it is to recognize those small businesses as major drivers of our economy. We do tend to look at those monolithic structures, those huge organizations, but still in Alberta and across Canada it's small- and medium-sized businesses that really provide most of the jobs for people.

I urge the government to go back and look, to try – they had a red tape commission, and once again we never heard what came out of it. I never saw what was being reduced or done. [interjection] Well, yeah, supposedly that was a plan, but it's a plan that doesn't exist if you don't share it with the rest of the people. So I'm wondering again what is being done and what is in this throne speech for my small businesspeople and small businesspeople across the province.

We are at a really interesting point in Alberta here. We have an economic entity in the oil sands. Various deals have been struck over the years to have an exchange of money that comes back to Albertans to compensate them for the use of and access to their assets, but I also think that increasingly people feel that there needs to be much stronger environmental protection. It's a challenge to us. I remember a friend once talking about the war on carbon and the fact that it's not so much that our oil and gas reserves will run out – they will. They just get more expensive to produce and get out of the ground. But it's not so much that. The war on carbon is about other people saying that they don't want it anymore. And we may move faster than we expected to a point where that oil and gas, a nonrenewable natural resource, may not be as much of a significant force in our budget as it is today.

I think we need to look very strongly at developing a greener economy and investing in other forms of renewable energy as quickly as possible. We continue to make the same mistake over and over and over again. Peter Lougheed nailed it: we have to diversify our economy. That was 35 years ago that he said that, and frankly we haven't gone very far down the road to diversify that economy. So that is a continuing concern for me.

Perhaps a tightening of economic times will encourage us to be more creative and to look toward investing in some of the renewable energy resources that we can produce here. I'm looking at these tougher economic times and that whole debate about: run a deficit, don't run a deficit, cut, don't cut. What has come back to me from the people that have contacted me is that we need to be careful to maintain an investment in certain things. What's the criteria on that? I think the criteria is: if we don't invest in this now and continue to invest in this given entity, will we be in better or worse shape when we come out of this economic recession? I think the areas that we need to continue to invest in include infrastructure for two reasons. One, because it is a stimulus for the economy; it is jobs for our citizens. Also, we need that infrastructure when we come out of this. If we don't continue to invest in it and to have bridges and public

transportation and municipal buildings ready, we will truly be in a challenging place when the economy starts to pick up on us and we the government have not been able to provide that infrastructure that we need to really move forward. So infrastructure is one.

Health, clearly. For those of us that have dealt with these issues recently, if you don't have health, you have nothing. All the money in the world means nothing to you if you are ill or dying. It means nothing. We really have a pressure upon us to provide our citizens with the best possible health care.

Beyond that, I think we need to have the discussion with our citizens and encourage them to have the discussion about what kind of health care. How far? What is the continuum of health care that they expect us to provide? There are trade-offs involved in that. You can't expect citizens to be happy with the result that's handed to them if they didn't get to be involved in the discussion, and I think we need to have a discussion. When I watch some of the public discussions they have in Holland, I'm amazed. I mean, they actually had a public discussion that went on for several years on euthanasia and came to a decision on it. That's their societal expectation, that's what they've set down as a policy, and they all bought into it. Pretty brave. I wish we could get closer to that because I think that in some ways we set ourselves up in that we don't allow the citizens to have that discussion about exactly how much health care is enough.

I would also challenge the minister of health, as I have before, rather than saying "This is how much money we're going to spend on health care; make everybody healthy for that amount of money," to say "How healthy do we want people to be? What are the benchmarks that we want to hit? What kind of delivery of programs are acceptable to us?" and then fund to that. That also includes that discussion with the citizens; that's a part of that.

I think we have to continue to invest in education and in children. No question. I would also argue that investment in the arts – okay, it's near and dear to my heart, so sue me, but I think an investment in arts and culture continues to have a considerable payback. We know it's between \$3 and \$7 for every dollar invested.

I think that there's also a role of government to provide what no corporation will provide unless there's a profit that comes out of it. That's areas like protection of vulnerable people; housing, particularly around mental illnesses services and programming; seniors; and AISH. One of the people that contacted me was really concerned because her son is on AISH. She's experiencing a situation where AISH will subsidize this fellow for a bus pass but they won't subsidize him for a DATS pass. Well, lots of people on AISH require a DATS pass, so this is an interesting discrimination. I would ask the government to look to this, and I'll also provide additional documentation to the relevant minister. Honestly, that's one of the areas that needs to be looked at. [Ms Blakeman's speaking time expired]

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was just wanting to learn more about what the views of the Member for Edmonton-Centre are on the throne speech.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. One of the other areas that I have had a significant amount of correspondence on – and if I have, everybody has – is around seniors' unhappiness with the plans for changes in pharmaceuticals and in long-term care and assisted living. I've had a lot of correspondence, and people have phoned me on it. There is a real sense there that middle-income seniors, particularly on a fixed middle income, are being dinged in a way that

they did not expect. They feel it's unfair and it's a breaking of that contract with them of what they expected to be available to them when they retired.

3:50

Let's face it. I mean, the government has always looked after truly vulnerable, disadvantaged, bottom of the heap, absolutely no- or little-income seniors. They always have. This is now adding to it a small number of other seniors that are equally low income. But, you know, my mother has a teacher's pension. She would get covered and be paying full freight on this one for a fairly small teacher's pension, and she's some 20 years into it. So this is a real concern from seniors.

I think the other issue that is of real interest and concern here is the relationship with the municipalities. I am bringing forward Bill 204 later in the session, which I hope will provoke a discussion – well, I know it will provoke something – about how we fund municipalities. I'm asking the government to consider allocating a portion of income and corporate tax directly to the municipalities for them to use in their operating funding because they're being expected to carry a lot of the load, and they do not have access to the same amount of funding in order to do that.

I'd also like to see the status of Edmonton as the capital city upheld. I know that when a lot of my colleagues from the government side were elected in Edmonton, somehow Edmonton was to be highlighted again. I would argue that that's happening less and less. Increasingly press conferences and big announcements happen just about anywhere but Edmonton, and this is the capital city. The Legislature Building is here in the fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre, and I think that the respect that is due this institution and this building should be upheld.

I've had a lot of feedback on that from people, as well as on the Legislature Grounds renewal themselves, which is a project that has now, I think, been tried 12 times, three times to my knowledge. We have an opportunity here to create a real jewel of a building and of a Legislature grounds, and I hope that the members will support the plan when it comes forward. It could be quite fabulous, and I hope it will be, but thus far all other attempts have failed because it didn't have the support of the very members that are elected to sit in this House.

Those are some of the issues that I wanted to raise in addition. Thank you for the question, Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

The final issue is around support and stabilization for the not-for-profit associations, that we depend on so much to deliver many of the programs that government, in fact, is legislated to provide. At this point they need some stabilization. They need contracts to be written with cost-of-living increases in them and some sort of wage parity for their staff.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Other questions?

Then I'll recognize the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for this opportunity to address the Chamber and express my commitments to the plan for Alberta set forth by His Honour the Lieutenant Governor in his Speech from the Throne on Tuesday. Over the past year I have appreciated the opportunity to serve the citizens of Lethbridge in this Assembly, work with our great Premier and this wonderful group of colleagues that I have here.

I can't help but think back to a year ago, when oil prices were at a record high and our economy was white hot. Of course, we know now what a difference a year can make in light of the global

uncertainty. Oil prices have dropped lower than anyone could have predicted, but our future remains bright under the steady direction of this government. Mr. Speaker, while we are not immune to the impacts of the global economic conditions, Alberta is still the envy of much of the world. Today we're seen as an example of how smart policy and wealth management can weather an economic storm and even take advantage of the downturn. Thanks to policies put in place by this government years ago to eliminate our net debt and thanks to our unswerving commitment to saving and reinvesting Alberta's wealth, we are in a perfect position for continued prosperity in today's global economy.

Mr. Speaker, it is evident in His Honour's Speech from the Throne that this government is committed to marketing our energy resources to economies around the world while at the same time continuing to expand and diversify our economy. I believe my hometown of Lethbridge is a perfect example of the diversity that can strengthen our economy. As you know, Lethbridge is less dependent on the energy sector than most cities in Alberta. We are known as an agricultural city serving farm communities from Pincher Creek to Taber, north to Claresholm, and all the way to the U.S. border. We are the irrigation capital of Canada and are committed to farmers, livestock producers, and the food processors who turn it all into the food we can eat every day.

I was pleased at this government's continuing support of these areas as a priority in the Speech from the Throne, particularly the livestock and meat strategy, but Lethbridge is much more than just a farm town. Light manufacturing is the foundation of our industrial sector. We are also home to a thriving retail and hospitality sector. Lethbridge is the hub of shopping and entertainment for many rural areas surrounding the city. As a small businessman myself I know that small business is the engine that drives southern Alberta and the entire Alberta economy. Support for and from this sector will be critical to Lethbridge and Alberta's continued prosperity. We rely on small business and Lethbridge alone to generate 8,000 jobs, and small business in turn relies on us to buy locally. As Lethbridge Chamber of Commerce's Dennis Hatt put it last fall, as long as everyone continues to spend locally, Lethbridge and Alberta will make it through these tough times relatively unscathed.

Lethbridge is also world renowned as a hub of advanced education and research, which I believe is another driving force behind our diverse economy in Lethbridge and Alberta. I'd be willing to bet that my city has more PhDs per capita than any other city in Alberta. University of Lethbridge president Bill Cade likes to refer to Lethbridge as a smart city, and I agree one hundred per cent. We're home to two world-class agricultural research centres and two excellent postsecondary institutions. It's no exaggeration to say that U of L is a leader in the areas of behavioural neuroscience, water conservation, and much more. At the same time, Mr. Speaker, Lethbridge College is taking a lead in wind power. The school recently became the first institution in North America to offer wind turbine technician training in addition to its many other programs.

Obviously, this is the kind of work referred to in the research and innovation act mentioned in His Honour's speech, and I believe this government will continue to support that attitude of staying on the cutting edge. Research and postsecondary education will continue to provide Albertans with local opportunities to advance their skills and remain competitive in today's economy, and I expect both the U of L and Lethbridge College to see increased enrolment over the coming semesters.

Mr. Speaker, I'm sure my constituents were also encouraged by the promotion of the arts in Alberta. Lethbridge may not be a big city, but we have a thriving arts community that would be the envy of a city twice our size. I know that many of these folks, particularly

on the city's allied arts council, will be impressed with the government's efforts to boost arts across Alberta.

As a senior-friendly community, Mr. Speaker, Lethbridge has also been a leader in seniors' care, and I'm encouraged by the Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act put forward in His Honour's speech. I firmly believe that we must continue to do everything that we can to give Alberta seniors a level of care they deserve when it's needed and where it's needed, and long-term sustainable support for seniors' drop-in centres is critical to their long-term viability. I'm proud that some of the initiatives being considered by Alberta Health Services are based on models developed in my home area.

Mr. Speaker, I was also encouraged to see this government's commitment to continue with infrastructure projects throughout Alberta. There is the obvious benefit of job creation, but at the same time we can use this opportunity to update aging structures and build much-needed new ones at a time when costs are lower and prepare for future growth, which we know will come. In Lethbridge I know that a number of infrastructure projects are eagerly awaited, including building new schools and renovating the old ones.

Mr. Speaker, this is truly an historic time in Alberta. We're facing our first economic challenge since wiping out the debt and creating our sustainability fund, and we are being put to the test. Global economic conditions are putting incredible pressure on Canada and Alberta, but I have every confidence that this government's policies – past, present, and future – will allow us not only to survive global uncertainty but to thrive in it. I believe that this government will continue to be innovative and think outside the box in our quest to maintain that excellent quality of life we enjoy here in Alberta, and I believe the can-do attitude that built this province from the ground up will continue to sustain us as it always has in the past. To repeat something I said last year in my maiden speech – and I believe it even more relevant today – when all Albertans work together towards a common goal, there is nothing we can't accomplish.

4:00

Mr. Speaker, I believe the perfect example of that attitude is Lethbridge's own High Level Bridge. As many of you know, it's the highest and longest bridge of its kind in the world. When it was built, at the turn of the century, it was a true marvel of both engineering and sheer willpower, built by brave folks who understood the value of what they were doing. There were no guarantees about the future of that bridge, but those men and women understood that it needed to be built. This year Lethbridge is celebrating the hundredth anniversary of that High Level Bridge with a number of community events, including conferences, tournaments, and community parties. I doubt that the folks who built that bridge could have possibly imagined that their handiwork would not only be standing today but would still be used for its original purpose: to speed trains across the expanse of the Oldman River and increase the efficiency of the railroad.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to take this opportunity to invite the members of this House and everyone in Alberta to make Lethbridge a destination this year, see this great steel monument of innovation, iron will, and hard work. When they see it, I hope they will take some time to ask themselves this question: if Albertans could build something like this a hundred years ago with only the tools available at the time, with all our resources and ingenuity what incredible feats could we accomplish today for our future generations?

Thank you.

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

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciated the discussion

going on today, wide-ranging issues. I wanted to start with an issue that I've not heard raised in this Assembly before but that I think is appropriate to raise when we're discussing a throne speech, and it goes to the structure of our government. Now, my comments are not in any way meant as a reflection on the performance of the Lieutenant Governor or the Governor General or the Royal Family or anything like that. Frankly, I think it's time for us to begin a discussion of whether we want to continue in this country under the form of a constitutional monarchy, that leads to the process through which we actually have a throne speech. I'm just beginning to open this up to get people to think about it before I shift to other comments.

Through my life I've always been a loyal and supportive monarchist, so up until the last year the idea of a Speech from the Throne was to me not only something to debate and something to look at the government's agenda but also was a sort of charming and delightful and functional process of our government. In the past year I've found myself actually questioning the wisdom of our country continuing to be governed under the Queen of England. I suppose a year ago I would have been surprised to even hear myself say this, but I am increasingly coming to the mind that we need to replace the monarchy with some other form of government if we are to actually fulfill our destiny as a nation.

I think that having a Speech from the Throne, i.e. from Her Majesty's representative, continues somehow to reflect and inject a sense of colonialism into our society and into this Chamber. I think that we're at a point in our nation's history that we should open the debate again about whether it isn't time for us to move beyond being a constitutional monarchy and move towards having a structure of government in which the monarchy in Britain is replaced by something that's actually Canadian. I think that would be an important psychological step for our fulfilling our destiny as a nation. So I open up a little discussion there, which may or may not go anywhere.

I was disappointed in the contents of the throne speech. I don't think that'll be a great surprise to anybody. I am concerned that the government is not showing any great foresight in terms of anticipating where we need to be going. I am concerned, when I go through the throne speech, that this government is not taking the necessary steps to secure the long-term future of this province.

I'm going to start by just talking briefly about spending. This is an issue that I've raised many times. I actually began raising this concern, I think, when I was first elected as an MLA. It was certainly a consistent theme when I was Leader of the Opposition, and it will remain that way because I believe it. We as a Legislative Assembly year after year approve budgets and approve the plans laid out in the throne speech that in the long term are not sustainable. Last fall we had the Premier of the province saying in this Assembly that we have the highest spending, lowest taxing government in Canada. He said it with great pride, and he's right, but there's a problem with that. That's going to catch up to us, Mr. Speaker. There's just no way around it. If we don't begin addressing those issues, there's going to be a very, very rude awakening for the people of Alberta and for future members of this Assembly.

I was particularly disappointed in the throne speech when there was absolutely no mention of what I think was the most important document to come out of government in the last year, and that was the Mintz report. I thought, in fact, that the whole handling of the Mintz report was indicative of this government's bad attitude toward addressing the fundamentals of Alberta's sustainability. I don't know how many members of this Assembly have read the Mintz report, but everybody should. You should read it carefully because it lays out in very careful detail and very thorough analysis the fact that this spending and tax regime that we have in this province is not

going to work, that if we continue to spend and proceed in the way we are, there is a foreseeable point, as the Mintz report points out, where there will need to be a 40 per cent increase in taxes in Alberta. It's not going to work, Mr. Speaker, and there is nothing in the throne speech to give me any sense that that issue is being addressed.

When I look at the spending and behaviour patterns of this government compared to other provinces, I'm left astonished. We are spending – and the Premier freely admits it – far higher than other provinces. We're spending, I believe, 23 per cent higher than the average of other provinces. It's even more astonishing when you compare to other have provinces. You go to British Columbia; we are spending 28 per cent per capita higher than British Columbia. Now, it'll all get thrown back at me: well, where would you cut? You know, talking out of both sides of my mouth because we want to have strong public health care and good education and so on. But my point is this: where's the management of this money?

You go to B.C., and – you know what? – B.C.'s highways are actually pretty good. You look at the rankings of universities, and the UBC consistently ranks higher than any of Alberta's universities. You look at their provincial parks. You know what? They're a heck of a lot nicer than ours. You look at their environmental standards. You look at things like B.C.'s pharmacare program: considerably more comprehensive than Alberta's. They deliver public auto insurance. They actually own their own electrical company. They manage to do all of that at a standard that across the board is comparable to Alberta's – some places a little higher, some places a little lower – but they do it spending 28 per cent less per citizen. That raises a really big question: where's the value-for-money issue in this throne speech? It doesn't exist. It's like it hasn't dawned on the members of this government that we need to pay closer attention to how we're spending money.

4:10

There's a Chinese proverb, Mr. Speaker, that goes something like this: "Govern a great nation as you would cook a small fish." I think it's worth thinking about that for a minute. It tells you that the best way to govern a great nation is to pay close attention to the tiniest details. Cooking a small fish. Those are about the only kind I've ever caught in my life. I'm going ice fishing this coming weekend; maybe I'll have better luck.

Cooking a small fish, you know, you've got to attend to it every minute. You've got to attend to every detail. That's the whole point here. We need a government that has value for money front and centre. We're spending more than we need to. The only people who have real access to this information are the people sitting in the government benches, and it doesn't even appear in the throne speech.

We've heard comments today about how wonderful the government's strategy for savings is. I think that's delusional. If you want to see an effective strategy for savings, of course, Norway is always brought forward. Look at Alaska. Look at a number of countries in the Middle East. You can even look at Russia. They all have more effective strategies for savings than Alberta.

In fact, if you want to ask yourself, "How good is our strategy for savings?" just compare the value of the heritage fund today to what it was 20 years ago. The only long-term savings vehicle we have in this province is the heritage fund. If we have a good strategy for savings, surely you would think that the value of the heritage fund would be increasing. Or even go back to the time, Mr. Speaker, when you were first elected, and go back to the time when the Premier of Alberta was Don Getty. You know what? You'll find that the heritage fund was worth more then than it is today.

Now, we have a sustainability fund, which is a great idea. It's

open to some abuse as a slush fund, that I'm not keen on, but at least the sustainability fund is there. That will secure us through this year. There's the capital fund, which is pretty well fully allocated. But the harsh reality is that if we don't get a lot more serious, if we don't take a hard-core value-for-money audit of everything this government does, we're spending our way to a disaster. It's not sustainable. The government's own report, the Mintz report, proves that. I was disappointed and deeply troubled, in fact, that that issue isn't addressed anywhere. There doesn't even seem to be a consciousness of it anywhere on the government benches.

I think, as well, we need to look at how the government moves with booms and busts of the resource cycle. This is a time to be investing in capital expenditure. I think that countercyclical spending is good. We've not done that historically. I'd like to see something more explicit laid out in the throne speech to address that. The fact is that these booms and busts that we go through in Alberta are wasteful. All you need to do is go back 20 years. I can show people the figures for this. You go back to 1986. What was the highest spending government per person in Canada? Well, no surprise there; it was the Alberta government. The year that Peter Lougheed handed the torch to Don Getty, he handed Don Getty the most expensive government in Canada: 1986.

Well, Mr. Getty began cutting, and we all know that Mr. Klein, the next Premier, cut more drastically. So we went from the biggest spending government in the country in 1986 to 1996, when we were spending the lowest per person in the country. We weren't sustaining our infrastructure, and we weren't training the doctors and nurses. We found that that was unsustainable. Move forward to 2006, and who is the biggest spending government in the country again? Us, this government here.

Those kinds of swings are incredibly wasteful. They're wasteful in terms of infrastructure. They're wasteful in terms of the human resources that make a society work. That kind of swinging should be brought to an end. I hope that this government understands that.

Where do we find ourselves now when we surf on these booms and busts and when we don't have a long-term savings strategy? Well, we find ourselves terribly exposed to international swings in oil and gas prices. We're at a point a mere few months after the price of oil dropped and the price of gas dropped. What are we doing? Well, there's a freeze on hiring new cancer treatment doctors, for example. There's a freeze on hiring new positions at the university. We're actually looking at a serious retrenching here. Where was the strategy to protect us from those swings in the value of world petroleum prices? It wasn't there, and we need one, Mr. Speaker.

There is a way to respond to that, and that is to have a long-term strategy to build up the heritage fund to a point where it can generate enough investment income to offset the royalties that come from oil and gas. It's absolutely doable. All kinds of groups have demonstrated that, but somehow this government doesn't get it. I would have been thrilled, Mr. Speaker, to have seen a throne speech that addressed those kinds of issues, a throne speech that said: we are going to review our spending carefully, and we are going to put in place a long-term savings strategy so that the next time the price of petroleum drops, we don't care because we've saved enough to have investment income that offsets it.

Mr. Speaker, I could go on at length, but I'm out of time. I hope I've given some food for thought to the members of this Assembly.

Thank you.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. God bless technology. I was able to listen to the member on the Tannoy, and I'm wondering if he can just expand on the last series of points that he was making.

Thank you.

Dr. Taft: Sure. I'd be thrilled to. I love this 29(2)(a). I was a skeptic of it at one time, but it's actually quite useful.

I think, really, what I wanted to complete saying was just a little bit about a vision of where we could be going, Mr. Speaker, if we had a different kind of strategy. If we had a long-term strategy to build up a savings account to earn enough investment to offset royalties, that would be a huge step forward.

At the same time we need to understand that we have to invest in other resources of this society, the people and the infrastructure. I would have loved to have seen in the throne speech a plan for an endowment for postsecondary education so that we could actually turn Calgary and Edmonton and Lethbridge and Red Deer and every place in this province with a college or a technical school – Grande Prairie, Vermilion, and on and on – into bigger centres of excellence and invest in the one thing that we can be sure will secure the long-term prosperity and vibrancy of Alberta, and that's education. As it is right now, our universities and colleges and technical schools are having to tighten down the hatches because in the last few months the price of oil dropped. It doesn't make sense, and that's not a way to secure our future. We should work to ensure that our postsecondary institutions are independent of those pressures.

We also, of course, will need to attend to the vulnerable at this time. I was working near the front lines of that sector in the 1980s, when the bottom fell out of the economy, and I expect we're going to see this similar pattern in the next year, which is a huge increase in unemployment in Alberta, and that ripples through to family members, to children, to seniors. We need to as a government of conscience make sure that the vulnerable are well taken care of.

I'd suggest that we can rearrange a few priorities, which I questioned last fall. For example, why the heck are we channelling money to golf courses, to semi-private golf courses, or to drag racing strips or to horse racing or to a whole bunch of other things when there are much more severe needs? I think the public would agree with me and would probably get behind any member of this Assembly who says: "You know what? Let the people who drag race their cars pay their own bills. We're going to make sure that seniors who are needy or hungry kids going to school are looked after. That's a core business of government. Supporting golf courses and drag races and so on is not."

Those are a few of my comments, Mr. Speaker, and that's what I would have liked to have seen in the throne speech. Thank you.

4:20

The Speaker: Are there others with a question? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. One of the concepts that is coming around again is the idea of intergenerational debt. I heard that mentioned in the throne speech, and it's certainly something we heard a lot from the former Premier. Yet I had always found that in the choices that were made by that government, they shifted the debt onto the next generation instantaneously, mostly by affecting postsecondary students in the amount of their tuition fees and the entire set-up of the way their loans were working, the fact that they had to get more commercial loans. Do you see a transfer of debt intergenerationally continuing to happen or happening anew?

Dr. Taft: That was a complicated question, but I think it comes down to understanding that education is an investment not just for the students who are going to university or college or a school but

for us as a society. Having a well-educated citizenry is absolutely crucial to being a developed society. If we take that attitude, then we understand that this as an investment, and we don't want to burden the future generation with debt for that investment when we're the ones ourselves who are reaping its benefits. I think we need to be very alert to issues of intergenerational debt transfer, whether it's on education or whether it's in the environment or whether it's on finances.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, before I call on the hon. Minister of Infrastructure, might I just convey thanks to the hon. Minister of Infrastructure for coming into this Assembly between Christmas and New Year's and climbing up there on his big ladders and replacing all the light bulbs. I think they're all functioning today.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and given my fear of heights it was quite a task.

Mr. Speaker, I'm so pleased to be able to rise and respond to the Speech from the Throne today. I feel that even though the time has been shortened and this, in fact, also is my maiden speech, I could have passed off until next week to have done it, but I think it's important to Albertans that we finish today on a very strong and very hopeful note because that's exactly what Albertans are known for, and that's exactly what has been spelled out in our Speech from the Throne. So I'm going to take the few minutes that I have and speak a little bit about that.

The wisdom that I've seen in the Speech from the Throne speaks strongly to me, and it speaks strongly to the people of Drumheller-Stettler. My family has had a long history in that area. Next year we will celebrate the hundredth birthday of our farm. I am so proud of the things that have taken place in this province because of the leadership and because of the wisdom that have been shown throughout the years and that have been shown again in the Speech from the Throne and the directions that we've been taking. My grandson Luke this past year travelled with me on the tractor to go out and look after our livestock, and my grandson Luke is the sixth generation of my family to have done so on our property.

The area and the people of Drumheller-Stettler have so many things to celebrate because of the advantages that this province has brought to them, and this goes way back. I carry a reminder to let me know our place in this world and the significance of the things that we do but also to try and refocus that we have to do the positive things and that it's a big world and that many things have happened and that there have been many challenges that were faced. One of the things that I carry with me is a piece of petrified wood from the Drumheller Valley. One hundred and fifty million years ago it was a tree. At the time that this piece of petrified wood was a tree, *tyrannosaurus rex* travelled in the valley in Drumheller. Scientists nowadays say that it was a meteorite strike that, in fact, sent them to their extinction, which puts into perspective the difficulties that we face today. Mr. Speaker, I don't find them to be difficulties; I find them to be challenges. As we've gone through time, at about the time the dinosaurs disappeared, the great wealth this province has in the oil industry appeared, and we today are enjoying that.

In my constituency we contribute greatly to that wealth in the province, and the people in my area appreciate it. My constituency is 420 kilometres across, and at the time that I was elected, I represented 28 elected bodies within my constituency. These people have given me a wonderful amount of insight into the things that they would like me to bring forward. They're very free with the information that they give you and with their opinions. Some of my colleagues in this room have relatives down there, and they could attest to that.

They go by a lot of things that they've thought about in the past, and one of the things that I'm always reminded of when I represent them is that they love the area that they're in, and they were the first environmentalists. The reason that we have people clamouring right now to save this pristine environment is because these people have been the environmentalists that saved that pristine environment over the last hundred years, and I thank them for it. Were it not for them, we would have nothing to protect, Mr. Speaker.

It was an anonymous poet that wrote this, but one of my constituents gave it to me many, many years ago to hang on the wall. The poem goes:

Sweet, clean air from east to west
And room to go and come.
I loved my fellow man the best
When he was scattered some.

They still believe that out there, Mr. Speaker. They like their open spaces, they like the pristine environment, and they like living in Alberta.

The Lieutenant Governor closed with: "It is Alberta's people that make our province unique: people who are dynamic and genuine, optimistic and open-minded, people who share the freedom to create and the spirit to achieve." Mr. Speaker, that's what an Albertan is. That's what an Albertan has always been. With that type of guidance and the type of guidance and the groundwork that have been laid out in the Speech from the Throne, Albertans need not fear the future no matter what they hear from some people.

They need to celebrate the past, celebrate the future, and prepare for it because what's happening right now, Mr. Speaker, is a correction globally. As we come out of the correction, because of the good decisions that have been made in the province and this groundwork that's been laid before us, we will come out of this stronger than we have ever come out before, with opportunities for my grandson that no other generation has ever seen. I am extremely optimistic and know and have confidence in the people of Alberta to

make the right decisions, to do the right things so that we go forward stronger than we ever have in the past.

The leadership that's been shown has shown so many results, and I've seen them within my community. As I look back through history, right back to a rather significant archaeological dig that was done on my property, I will talk about one other spot in history that I find extremely interesting. Six thousand years ago there was a volcanic eruption in a similar area to where Mount St. Helens took place. As the archaeologists work around the province, they hit an ash layer as they went down, and that ash layer signifies 6,000 years ago. Aboriginal peoples made their living off the land right where I live on the farm going back what they consider to be about 10,000 years ago, so approximately three times as long ago as when the pyramids were created.

This province has in the past, as it does right now, provided the things that people needed. We've seen so many changes. We've seen new approaches. At the time that my great-grandfather and my great-grandmother and my grandfather came to Alberta and homesteaded and went out where there were no trails and used oxen to drag the wagon out into the area, there were no trees where I live right now. Back in the days before the homesteaders came in, the aboriginal people used fire to bring the buffalo back. When the grasses grew old and needed renewal, they actually set strategic fires to burn the grasses away to bring back the green grasses so that the buffalo came to them instead of them trying to search them out.

The Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member. The hon. member should know that he'll be recognized next. He still has seven minutes and 50 seconds to participate in the Speech from the Throne if he so chooses, but the House now stands adjourned until next Tuesday afternoon at 1:30.

[The Assembly adjourned at 4:30 p.m. to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

Bill Status Report for the 27th Legislature - 2nd Session (2009)

Activity to February 12, 2009

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 200 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills with lower numbers are Government Bills. Bills numbered Pr1, etc., are Private Bills.

*An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If it comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel for details at (780) 427-2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned a chapter number until the conclusion of the fall sittings.

- 1 Employment Standards (Reservist Leave) Amendment Act, 2009 (Stelmach)**
First Reading -- 6 (Feb. 10 aft.)
- 2 Lobbyists Amendment Act, 2009 (Redford)**
First Reading -- 9 (Feb. 11 aft.)
- 3 Credit Union Amendment Act, 2009 (Berger)**
First Reading -- 17 (Feb. 11 aft.)
- 4 Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2009 (Bhullar)**
First Reading -- 17 (Feb. 11 aft.)
- 5 Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2009 (Griffiths)**
First Reading -- 17 (Feb. 11 aft.)
- 6 Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Amendment Act, 2009 (Forsyth)**
First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft.)
- 7 Public Health Amendment Act, 2009 (Liepert)**
First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft.)
- 8 Feeder Associations Guarantee Act (\$) (Groeneveld)**
First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft.)
- 9 Government Organization Amendment Act, 2009 (Campbell)**
First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft.)
- 10 Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act (Dallas)**
First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft.)
- 11 Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2009 (VanderBurg)**
First Reading -- 19 (Feb. 11 aft.)
- 12 Surface Rights Amendment Act, 2009 (Berger)**
First Reading -- 19 (Feb. 11 aft.)
- 13 Justice of the Peace Amendment Act, 2009 (Redford)**
First Reading -- 19 (Feb. 11 aft.)

Table of Contents

Thursday, February 12, 2009

Introduction of Guests	41
Ministerial Statements	
Oil Sands Development Strategy	41
Members' Statements	
Calgary-Montrose Block Watch Programs	42
National Anthem	43
Statement of Appreciation	43
Outstanding Calgary-Mackay Constituents	50
Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder	51
Delisting of Health Services	51
Oral Question Period	
Oil Sands Development Strategy	43, 44, 47, 49, 50
Seniors' Pharmaceutical Plan	44
Provincial Budget Release	46
Highway Construction in the Oil Sands	46
Carbon Emissions Reduction	47
Enforcement of Environmental Laws	48
Oil Sands Tailings Ponds	48
Temporary Foreign Workers	49
Graduated Drivers' Licences	50
Tabling Returns and Reports	51
Projected Government Business	52
Consideration of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech	52

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.