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The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, February 18, 2009

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon and welcome. I would ask all hon. members and those in the galleries to remain standing after the prayer so that we may pay tribute to a former colleague who has passed away.

Let us pray. Renew us with Your strength. Focus us in our deliberations. Challenge us in our service to the people of this great province. Amen.

Mr. William (Bill) Mack

April 1, 1924, to February 17, 2009

The Speaker: On February 17, 2009, Mr. William (Bill) L. Mack, former Member of the Legislative Assembly, passed away. Bill Mack was first elected in the election held March 14, 1979, and served until November 1, 1982. During his years of service he represented the constituency of Edmonton-Belmont for the Progressive Conservative Party. During his term of office Bill Mack served on several committees: standing committees on Public Affairs; Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing; Offices of the Auditor General and the Ombudsman; the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund Act; and Legislative Offices.

With our admiration and respect there is gratitude to members of his family who shared the burdens of public office. Our prayers are with them. In a moment of silent prayer I ask you to remember hon. Member Mr. William (Bill) Mack as you have known him. Rest eternal grant unto him, O Lord, and let light perpetual shine upon him. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

Mr. Blackett: Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly His Excellency Rafet Akgunay, ambassador of the Republic of Turkey, and his wife, Mrs. Akgunay. This is the ambassador's first visit to Alberta. We are very pleased to welcome him and his wife to our beautiful province.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta and Turkey have a strong connection through our trade and through our people. Our two-way trade is valued at about \$75 million annually. The Turkish community is a vibrant part of Alberta's dynamic cultural mosaic.

Mr. Speaker, I'd ask that His Excellency and Mrs. Akgunay please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

Introduction of Guests

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

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted today to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly a very talented and successful young Albertan, Myranda Stewart of Strathmore. Myranda was chosen from among 90 of the province's top 4-H members as the 2008 Premier's award winner, the highest accolade in the 4-H program.

Myranda has been a member of 4-H for several years, specifically the Cheadle 4-H club, where she held several executive positions. Her community involvement and exceptional leadership skills as

district key member have earned her this great honour. In addition to her duties as the Premier's award recipient Myranda is currently serving as a 4-H ambassador promoting the opportunities available through 4-H. Highlighting her year as the 2008 Premier's award winner, Myranda is here visiting us today and to meet the Premier.

Mr. Speaker, I have had the pleasure of listening to this young girl speak, and I'm quite pleased that she's not down here on the floor speaking, or there might be 83 of us that might not look to be the best speakers in the world. She's very exceptional. Myranda is seated in your gallery with her parents, Michelle and Darcy; her sister Kaity, who can give the best hugs in the world; and her brother Colten. I now ask that they rise to receive the usual warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and to introduce two people from very different parts of my life that I'm very happy to see here today. It is first of all a great pleasure of mine to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Mrs. Sharon Robins, who I know as my Auntie Sharon. Of course, I've known her since I was born. It was a great pleasure to see her today and a great surprise. She is a woman who has had an accomplished career as a senior manager in the department of municipal government and was a senior manager in emergency preparedness for the province of Alberta. I'd ask her to rise today and receive the warm welcome of this House.

With your indulgence, Mr. Speaker, the second person that I'd like to introduce today is a very good friend of mine, who I've known throughout much of my life overseas. His name is Mr. David Ennis. He is a lawyer who has spent a number of years in interesting places, as I have, such as Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Afghanistan. I think his greatest claim to fame is that he is a very profound legislative drafter who helped me in drafting the first electoral law in Afghanistan in 2005. I'd ask him to rise today and receive the warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour for me to rise today and introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly some of our members of the Department of Energy in the province of Alberta. I don't have to remind you that it's all about energy. These good folks know that as well. We have as guests today Margaret Winters, Chandra Kanta, Lori Kutschinski, Patricia Gannon, Anas Khan, Beverly Smith, Sherry Harder, Larysa Wozna, Lorna Villeneuve, Eleanor Wang, Vida Ramos, and Mila Jucutan. I would ask them to please rise and have the members give them the warm welcome that they deserve.

Ms Evans: Well, not to be outdone by my colleague, Mr. Speaker, you know, we're wonderfully blessed to have people in Finance to look after all of the wonderful attributes of Energy. Well, not all of them perhaps but at least some of them. Ashleigh Campbell, representing strategic and business services; from tax and revenue administration Benjamin Evans, Brynne Anderson, Christopher Sharpe, and Kehui Auyong. I hope I have pronounced that properly. We also have from risk management and insurance Maria Ramirez, Kelly York, and Guy Forest. I'd ask them to please rise and for us to extend our warmest welcome to them all.

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

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is with great pleasure that I rise today and introduce to you and through you a group of students from Holy Family school in my constituency of Edmonton-Ellerslie. These students are part of a group called O Ambassadors, who raise funds for development projects in developing countries and increase awareness of global issues at their school. I would like to thank the education assistant, Ranée Laporte, for her leadership on this project as well as Marlene Lecky Perron, teacher at Holy Family school, and two parent volunteers, Anne McClintock and Sharlynn Clark, for helping the students joining us this afternoon. I'd ask that teachers, parents, and students seated in the members' gallery please receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

1:40

Mr. Jacobs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to introduce to you and through you Mr. Mark Zemp from Raymond, Alberta. Mark has raised his family in Raymond and owns an insurance and registry business there. He's in Edmonton today on business in his capacity as president of the insurance agents' association of Alberta. I would ask Mark to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my privilege today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly one of my constituents. Jacqueline Biollo is married to a member of our armed forces. She's the mother of two exceptional children. She serves as a town councillor for the town of Beaumont, and she is the executive director of Seniors United Now. She is seated in the members' gallery. I would ask that she rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a great honour for me to rise and introduce to you and through to members of this Assembly a number of seniors and friends and family with us today from the Canadian Association of Retired Persons, Elder Advocates of Alberta, Public Interest Alberta, Seniors Helping Seniors, the Seniors' Action Liaison Team, Seniors United Now, and Friends of Medicare, every one of these Albertans deeply concerned by the health issues directly impacting seniors, including prescription drug costs, the availability of quality long-term care, emergency care, and more. I would ask them to rise in the House now and be welcomed by the Legislature.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Mahamad Accord, executive director of the Alberta Somali Community Center. The Alberta Somali Community Center is a broad-based, nonprofit organization that enjoys very strong community support and is well respected by other service providers as well as by funders. The centre was established in 2007 in response to a large influx of Somali newcomers to Alberta. The vision of the Alberta Somali Community Center is to integrate the Alberta Somali community fully into Canadian life by removing barriers and to build bridges between the Somali community and mainstream

Canadian culture. I would ask that Mr. Accord now rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly five students representing the students of Newton Place, a University of Alberta residence. In the past three years the students of Newton Place have experienced a 27 per cent increase in their rent. Their rent is far above what student loan regulations provide. Affordable housing is desperately needed. I'd now ask that my guests rise as I call their names to receive the traditional warm welcome from this Assembly: Nicholas Boers, Stephanie Au-Yeung, Usha Hemraz, Amanda Nelson, and Xiye Wang.

Members' Statements

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

O Ambassadors

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great honour to rise today and speak about the O Ambassadors group who have joined us this afternoon from the Holy Family school in my constituency of Edmonton-Ellerslie. Over 2,000 schools in North America are contributing to the O Ambassadors. This program helps to raise awareness and funds to support the United Nations' millennium development goals. These four goals focus on important issues such as poverty, hunger, education, and sustainable development. I had the honour and privilege of attending their fundraiser on January 30 along with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods. I'm proud to report that the group here today has raised \$5,939 to date. The group is working towards a goal of \$8,500 in order to build a school in Southeast Asia. Furthermore, any extra money will go towards textbooks, teachers' salaries, and clean water.

Today, Mr. Speaker, I would like to acknowledge the O Ambassadors from the Holy Family school and from all over North America for their selfless work in helping to create opportunities for students in developing nations. Thank you to all the teachers, organizers, parent volunteers, and students who contributed to the work to make this program a success. Your work is inspirational to all Albertans.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to provide an update to hon. members on the activities of the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities. Last fall we undertook a recruitment process, which saw nine new members appointed to the council. The personal and professional accomplishments of these new members and the diversity of their expertise made for a very impressive table at the council's three-day strategic planning session last month.

Joining the six returning members are Dan Bojarski of St. Brides, a certified industrial technologist with experience in hiring employees across a range of disabilities; Bryce Clarke of Ardrossan, a member of the Edmonton Police Service; Dr. John Latter, head of the division of physical medicine and rehabilitation at the University of Calgary; Brad Robertson of Calgary, who brings the perspective of persons with developmental disabilities; Amber Skoog of Stirling,

who lives with reduced vision and works as an alternate format editor at Lethbridge College; Kuen Tang of Edmonton, an active volunteer and the first student with quadriplegia to graduate from the University of Alberta's bachelor of education program; Pamela Wagner of Medicine Hat, who offers an employer perspective through her work with REDI Enterprises Society; Tammy Winder from Lethbridge, a parent who brings over 20 years of experience working with people with mental illness; and Carmen Wyton from St. Albert, the president and CEO of Special Olympics Alberta. Mr. Speaker, as deputy chair of the council it is an honour to work with such a distinguished group of Albertans.

Looking ahead, we see opportunities for our team to provide advice and leadership in areas such as enhancing employment opportunities throughout the Alberta economy and ensuring standards are in place for best practices in universal design.

Mr. Speaker, I look forward to providing a further update on council's strategic plan when it's finalized and, more importantly, to working in earnest with all members of this House on its implementation.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Adult Guardianship and Trusteeship Act

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to bring to the attention of this Assembly the significance of the Adult Guardianship and Trusteeship Act, or Bill 24, which received royal assent in December. The new act arose from a process of extensive public consultation as well as thorough legislative review involving both sides of the House and received strong support.

The Adult Guardianship and Trusteeship Act is progressive legislation that balances individual rights with assessment of capacity and replaces the 30-year-old Dependent Adults Act. There is no question that adult Albertans who require assistance to make personal decisions will benefit from this legislation. The act is designed to help people remain as independent as possible as long as possible. It provides more choices and safeguards to protect Albertans who can no longer make all their decisions.

Importantly, the act is designed to enhance the protection of Albertans who are not in a position to make decisions for themselves. It increases the choices available to people who need assistance in making personal decisions by providing a continuum of decision-making authorization to more formal, court-ordered guardianship. Guardianship will be used when other least-intrusive options have been tried and not been successful or the adult's incapacity to making decisions is more long term and permanent.

The new act makes significant improvements in the protection of vulnerable adults. The new legislation provides more safeguards to protect assisted and represented adults while providing more protective and investigative measures when there is concern about their safety. The act presumes adults are capable of making their own decisions unless determined otherwise through proper assessment.

The act provides for a more standardized capacity assessment model, which includes informing the adult about the purpose of assessment. The capacity assessor meets with the adult and conducts an in-depth interview after ensuring that the medical evaluation has been conducted to rule out temporary or reversible cause of incapacity.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Seniors' Pharmaceutical Plan

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Medications are essential and a daily cost for seniors. Money spent on medications to keep seniors healthy, like controlling blood pressure and diabetes, can be considered money saved through preventing both complications and hospitalization. They are protecting health and saving health dollars. My questions are to the Premier. Will the Premier admit that the new pharmaceutical plan is a further tax added to seniors?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, our government cares deeply about seniors. We know that our seniors are looking at their investments that have diminished dramatically over the last number of months. We're working together with all ministers to ensure that we maintain one of the best programs for seniors in the country of Canada, from long-term care to various housing options to home care, and we'll continue to provide those resources to our seniors.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Why is the government using total income and not net income for determining seniors' annual income and as a basis for their expenses for health care?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the minister of health has all of the details on the program. I want to mention to the House and to the seniors that are present here today and many that are watching that those who cannot afford to pay for badly needed drugs, we'll have a program in place that they can apply for assistance to make sure that no Albertan, senior or younger person, can't get the drugs that they need for improving their health.

Dr. Swann: My final question to the Premier: will the Premier admit that this is his own policy and not that of the minister of health, to charge seniors more for their pharmaceuticals?

Mr. Stelmach: This is a government policy. It had considerable input into formation of the policy, all towards maintaining the badly needed services tied to health to, we know, a senior population that will be increasing dramatically over the next number of years. I mean, I'm part of the baby boomer generation, or getting there. I know I look much younger. This is what we're working towards: make sure that it's sustainable, that we provide the best services, and to ensure that the next generation can also have the same kind of quality of life that we're enjoying in Alberta today.

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next questions are for the minister of health. We have a minister of health who believes that, quote, there should not be a sense of entitlement when you turn 65, end quote, and who dismisses the legitimate concerns of Albertans as whining. This attitude in a cabinet minister is extremely disappointing. To the minister: does the minister admit that by using income from 2008 we seriously underestimate the income seniors will be facing in 2009?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, as the Premier has mentioned and I stated in the House earlier to a question, the economic situation in the world has changed since we brought this policy through. The policy is still the right policy, but we've had a number of seniors raise issues such as the one the hon. leader has raised relative to: are some of the mechanics, if I could, right relative to what line of income? We're taking a look at all of those situations, and we'll make a determination as we go forward.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What is the minister's explanation for removing premium-free Blue Cross coverage for seniors, a plan that's been in place for over a decade?

Mr. Liepert: First of all, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is not correct. Currently, today, every senior pays 30 per cent of their prescription costs up to a maximum of \$25 no matter how poor or how wealthy seniors are. I think this is a perfect time for this question because on the news this morning we had a situation where General Motors and Chrysler are back at the table for more money. We have Air Canada on the verge of going into bankruptcy. All of these companies fundamentally have problems with their business models.

Now, if we take that into health care, Mr. Speaker, we have to change the fundamental business model of health care certainly in this province and, I believe, in this country because – I'll finish this story in my answer to the next question.

Dr. Swann: Well, it's indeed revealing that the minister of health sees health care as a business. That says a lot about what we're headed for in the next decade in health care, Mr. Speaker.

How does the minister justify it? The largest jump in Blue Cross premiums occurs when a person turns 65.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I'll complete my story. This has nothing to do with business. This is about comparing where we are in health care. So let's take a fundamental business model in health care today. I tell you, if General Motors and Chrysler go broke, we can still buy a Toyota car. If Air Canada goes into bankruptcy, we can fly WestJet. But if publicly funded health care, which this government stands on, goes broke, as some of these members would like to see it go, we will have exactly what they don't want to have: American-style health care. So we want to change the fundamentals to preserve the publicly funded health care in this province.

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

Long-term Care

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Seniors and often their families are concerned about their ability to find a long-term care bed when they need it, and the government's continuing care strategy has done little to reassure our Alberta seniors. My questions would be to the Premier. Mr. Premier, I too look a little younger than I am. Does the Premier feel that the first-bed policy for long-term care placement, that allows seniors to be moved from family, friends, and community, is a fair way to treat our frail Albertans?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I do agree with the member that she is very young looking. Never get caught in that debate; I can tell you that.

The hon. member raises a good question. Without a doubt, long-term care rates in Alberta compared to other jurisdictions are lower. However, I do know, representing a rural constituency where sometimes when a person suffers some catastrophic event – perhaps a stroke or they fall in their home; something happens – where husband and wife now are separated for a period of time, where they're put in a long-term care situation, perhaps not in the very same community for a period of time, a few miles away, that it is difficult for the senior that's at home. The spouse possibly doesn't have a driver's licence. How do you visit? You depend on family, or you depend on that home-care nurse. I know that situation. We understand that situation very, very well. That's why we're increasing the number of long-term care beds.

Also, let's give seniors choice in terms of assisted living, additional home care, all of those different models, rather than for whatever reason always institutionalizing our seniors. That's not a quality life.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do agree with the Premier that warehousing seniors is really not where we want to go.

My next question would be to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Would the minister commit to remove the first-bed policy, which is still going on today, as part of the continuing care strategy so that seniors can age and live out their lives in the right place?

Mr. Liepert: Well, I guess my answer would be that I would hope that we could provide the options that we wouldn't need this policy. If we had the appropriate options, that seniors had the choice, we wouldn't need that particular option. But keep in mind that if we were to remove that option today, we would be in many cases doing exactly what our opposition folks keep telling us they don't want to see in health care, and that's jumping the queue. If there is no facility available in this town and there isn't going to be one for 10 years, we need to ensure that if that senior needs care, it's provided within a region. You can't have it both ways, Mr. Speaker.

2:00

Ms Pastoor: Actually, I think you can have it both ways.

My next question would be to the same minister. Does the minister consider it fair that by allowing seniors' facilities to charge for increased services, low-income seniors may not receive the necessary care that they require; in other words, sort of a two-tier service within the same facility?

Mr. Liepert: Well, I guess we have choices and options that seniors make every day when they enter facilities. In some cases it's assisted daily living, that provides a certain level of service, and you pay in some cases more in some facilities than others. Is this government going to move to a system whereby everybody gets treated exactly the same and government funds everything? The answer is no.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party in the House, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Chief Electoral Officer

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This evening the axe hovers over the head of Alberta's Chief Electoral Officer. He stands charged with the capital crime of embarrassing the government, specifically that the accused pointed out that partisan appoint-

ments of those who run Alberta elections are inappropriate, unfair, and undemocratic. To the Premier: will you drop the charges against the accused and table legislation this session to end Tory patronage control of Alberta's electoral system?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the hon. member asked a similar question. Again I repeat to the hon. member that the person he's talking about is an officer of this Legislature. He's not employed by the Premier of Alberta. I don't assess his performance. The committee assesses his performance, and it's up to the committee, which has representation from all three parties.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, the accused, being the Chief Electoral Officer of the province of Alberta, stands further charged with the crime of embarrassing the government by pointing out that the government has systematically failed to prosecute charges brought under the act by him. The question is to the Premier. Will you drop the charges against the accused and tell Albertans why your Justice minister has failed to prosecute these violations of the Alberta Election Act?

Mr. Stelmach: Well, first of all, just listening to the question, he's got most Albertans baffled because he doesn't know who is being charged with what, I would think. It got me a bit baffled as well.

Anyway, if he's imputing motives to the Minister of Justice, saying that she did something inappropriately, not pursuing the charges because a Crown prosecutor says that we should, that's a different story. If he has evidence of that, get up in the House and say that with the protection of the immunity of the House.

But to go back to yesterday, saying that because I was elected Premier and that Albertans who wanted to vote for the leader of the Progressive Conservative Party bought a membership, voted, and then he tried to put that together and say that somehow that created a difficult situation for the next election – you know, I had calls yesterday from people wondering: where is this guy coming from? What voters list? We don't go through the voters list for election of a leader of a party. I'm sure the Liberals didn't do that, and if you did, you can tell us that. Well, I don't know when you're coming up for re-election, but I'm sure you're not going to grab the Alberta list and go through an election. I mean, he's got everybody baffled, but if he's got hard evidence of impropriety, get up in the House and say it.

Mr. Mason: I certainly have the Premier baffled, Mr. Speaker.

The accused stands charged with the crime of embarrassing the government by pointing out that 25 per cent of Albertans were not on the voters list in the last election because the government could not provide the required nominees for deputy returning officers in a timely fashion. Will the Premier drop the charges against the accused and give the Chief Electoral Officer the authority and resources he needs to run an effective, well-organized, and nonpartisan election campaign?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the budget is agreed upon by the Assembly, by the committee, not by the Premier.

Secondly, there were issues raised by at least two parties, that being the opposition, and I know that we had some issues that we wanted to talk about, but to say in this House that somehow as a Premier or as a government we manipulated the election is just pure junk. In fact, maybe – well, no. I won't make any comment because I don't want to dig the hole deeper than what this guy is digging for himself.

Thank you.

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

South Calgary Health Campus

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituents in Calgary-Hays have been waiting for some time now for the completion of the south Calgary health campus. My questions are all to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Why is the south Calgary health campus being built in phases when the need for a new health facility in the area is so great?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to clarify an answer that I gave yesterday in the House to the hon. Leader of the Opposition. He had me so worked up about the expansion at the Peter Lougheed that I didn't hear his question properly.

Mr. Mason: What a surprise.

Mr. Liepert: I was probably being interrupted by the leader of the third party, and I couldn't hear him. In fact, actually, the leader of the third party could take some lessons from the Liberal opposition, who have been behaving very appropriately in this House, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: And at that point in time we'll move on.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: when will each of the phases be completed?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I'll finish the rest of the story. Yesterday the hon. Leader of the Opposition asked me: "Will the minister at least commit to a 2011 completion of the south Calgary hospital?" My response was: "No, Mr. Speaker, I cannot at this time." As I said, I had mistakenly thought that he had asked me about the third phase of the Peter Lougheed hospital.

That being said, I cannot commit that it will be completed on time; 2011 is a long time away. But what I can say, Mr. Speaker, is that we have allocated a billion and a quarter dollars to this particular hospital. It is on schedule, on budget. I see no reason why it shouldn't be completed in 2011.* That's the first phase.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question: what services will be provided by the south Calgary health campus when phase 1 opens?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, phase 1 of the south Calgary campus will be a full acute facility which would have some 260 beds, an emergency department, intensive care units, 11 operating rooms – I could go on and on. I just want to reiterate that phase 1 of the south Calgary campus is part of some \$2 billion, \$3 billion, \$4 billion worth of health care projects that are either just completed, under way, or about to be completed in the next couple of years in the city of Calgary, which is some 50 per cent of our allocation of health care capital dollars.

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

Turner Valley Gas Plant

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday in the House the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit, who is

*See p. 68, left col., para. 13

responsible for the Turner Valley gas plant historical site, told us that because of tough economic times “we’re not going to . . . spend an untold amount of dollars to make sure that we remediate.” The message that I got is that Albertans should just stop whining if a contaminated site is affecting their water. My question is to the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit. Is the minister saying that in the upcoming budget there will be a decrease or an elimination in reclamation funding; in other words, no cash for cleanups?

Mr. Blakett: Well, Mr. Speaker, as everybody in this House knows, I have no idea what is in the next budget. That’s the privy of the minister of finance, and we’ll be informed in due course.

As far as reclamation, there is money being spent there. What I said is that we have remediated that site to an industrial standard. There will never be residential activity on that site; there’s an operating gas plant adjacent to it. The site has been remediated to a residential area from where there are walking paths to the individual buildings. At this time it’s prudent for us to take a look at our financial position. If we are going to go forward with further remediation or further expansion or an interpretive centre adjacent to that site, we’ll do so in due course.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Again to the same minister so that I can clarify: given that the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act states that where a substance that is causing or has caused an adverse effect is released into the environment, the person responsible, that being the minister representing the department, shall – not may but shall – take all responsible measures to repair, remedy, and confine the effects of the substance, is the minister saying that he won’t follow the act?

Mr. Blakett: Well, Mr. Speaker, I’m saying that we have done, indeed, all of those things. We have confined the site, we have remediated the site, we have enclosed a membrane, and we have made sure that there was no danger of contamination going to the Sheep River. There’s no seepage of contaminants into the groundwater. It is a site that’s remediated, and it could be used today, if we so choose, in a manner that is appropriate.

2:10

Ms Blakeman: I don’t think the 2,000 petitioners believe that.

My next question is to the Minister of Energy. Given that the minister responded to an issue raised by these same 2,000 people by saying that it’s an issue that isn’t there – and that’s in quotes – is the minister denying the seriousness of a contamination for which Alberta Health had issued a directive that pregnant women and children should be restricted from the site?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, with respect to the issuance of a directive around citizens that may or may not find it to their benefit to visit different industrial sites around the province of Alberta, I would suggest that there are probably a number of places that certain individuals may find it uncomfortable and perhaps not in their best interest to visit.

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

Carbon Capture and Storage

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the CBC interviewed President Barack Obama. The President is obviously

better informed on Alberta’s energy production than our CBC anchor, who misleadingly referred to the oil sands as tar sands. Informed Canadians note that this area might easily be called the job sands. Equally as impressive, the President agrees with Alberta and believes in the viability of carbon capture and storage. To the Minister of Energy. Alberta’s carbon capture and storage funding was announced in July. Can the minister advise when we’d expect to see these projects move forward?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I was very pleased, of course, with President Obama’s support for carbon capture and storage. I think that this is a thoughtful leader that’s looking for real solutions. We have one. We have carbon capture and storage moving ahead. What this does, in my opinion, is that it adds another very strong voice to the many voices around the world who now recognize that Alberta is a leader in carbon capture and storage technology. We’ll move ahead in the very short coming months and get our programs in place.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Much is made of the carbon emissions from the job sands development. My question is to the same minister. Can the minister tell us what the potential reduction in oil sands emissions could be from carbon capture and storage?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, I think that it’s important for us all to understand that when you look at the oil sands specifically, that’s not necessarily the largest emission of CO₂ in the province of Alberta. Coal-fired electrical generation is actually the largest emission. That said, there are significant opportunities for us to reduce emissions from oil sands and other areas in the province of Alberta, particularly on the oil sands issue with respect to upgrading and refining and the ability for us to capture CO₂ in those locations.

Mr. Johnson: To the same minister, Mr. Speaker: if Alberta taxpayers share in the cost of construction, infrastructure, research, costs for these large carbon capture and storage projects, will they also share in the rewards once these projects are operating and potentially generating revenue streams?

Mr. Knight: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, most certainly, when we look at the situation that we have in Alberta, we are very blessed with the resources in Alberta that help build this province, but also we’re blessed with geology that allows us to store CO₂. In certain circumstances enhanced oil recovery projects from CO₂ sequestration do result in a very large benefit to Albertans with respect to additional production of conventional reserves, which leads to wealth generation and also additional royalty collected.

Prosecutions under the Election Act

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, today I’m hoping for some answers regarding allegations that 19 electoral violations were ignored by the Minister of Justice. This might be of help to the Chief Electoral Officer, too, since it seems that he may lose his job for doing it too well. Will the Justice minister tell Albertans why Alberta Justice refused to adequately prosecute 19 violations of the Alberta Election Act as recommended for prosecution by the Chief Electoral Officer?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the Premier has made it very clear that we treat any concern expressed by the Chief Electoral Officer seriously. Our responsibility is always to determine – and this is a very important thing for people that, perhaps, aren't lawyers to understand. When we are prosecuting, we have two things that we must consider: one is what is in the public interest and, secondly, whether or not there is a reasonable likelihood of conviction. This is a fundamental principle of fair justice. It is at the core of what the Crown prosecution service does. It is part of their work on a daily basis. It is the difference between fair prosecution and persecution.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you for that answer, but do not these violations of the Election Act and the fact that the Chief Electoral Officer said they should be prosecuted lead us to believe in this House that the protection of democracy needs these violations prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, in our very complicated system we all have jobs to do. One of the things that the Chief Electoral Officer must do is see whether or not people have followed the rules. One of the things that the Department of Justice must do and which prosecutors must do in the Department of Justice is determine whether or not in absolutely every circumstance it is in the best interests of the public to prosecute. Part of the consideration for that is whether or not there is a reasonable likelihood of conviction.

Mr. Hehr: Do you not deem it to be in the public's best interest that we prosecute election violations regardless of a conviction or not?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, I believe that it is in the public's best interest to ensure that we have a transparent electoral system. We have that system. I also believe that it is within our jurisdiction as the Department of Justice to make decisions about what we need to prosecute to ensure that people are living in a democracy and living in a safe and secure community. The decision was made by prosecutors in the Department of Justice that in some cases it is not necessary to prosecute. It is only necessary to ensure that the behaviour does not happen again, and that is what we did.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Climate Change Policy

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are for the Minister of Environment. The minister has just returned from the Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment meeting in Whitehorse where, it appears, climate change and the policy relating thereto was a major topic of discussion. Can the minister advise the House whether the meeting dealt with Canada's position in preparation for President Obama's visit to Canada tomorrow?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I can assure this member and all members of the House that this meeting was planned well in advance of our finding out that the President was going to be coming to Ottawa tomorrow. I think it also should be said that, quite naturally, given the fact that the President is coming, that was a topic of some discussion. We talked about issues related to climate change and our policy respecting climate change. We also talked about other things, such as the tripartite air framework that we're working on and a

national strategy for our waste water and effluent. This is an ongoing, regularly scheduled meeting of Environment ministers.

Dr. Brown: Given that climate change was the topic of discussion, can the minister explain Canada's and Alberta's position on the North American policy, particularly since we have expressed in the past that we are against a cap-and-trade system?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd prefer to talk and discuss not so much what we are against but what we're for. That was the subject of discussion at that meeting. That was the subject of discussion of President Obama in his interview last night. We're looking for a North America-wide regulatory system that will allow the much-needed technology that is recognized by both the U.S. and Canada to develop our energy in a responsible way by the implementation of technology. Whatever that regulatory regime is, we will be doing our utmost to work with the Americans to bring it about.

Dr. Brown: Can the minister advise whether there was any discussion about Alberta being able to influence the upcoming Conference of the Parties negotiations in Copenhagen?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, that particular issue was the subject of much discussion at the meeting. To be frank, in the past the involvement of the provinces at the Conference of the Parties has been very limited. All ministers, myself included, were very much enthused and encouraged by the comments of Minister Prentice when he indicated that the provinces will be very much part of the development of the Canadian position at the conference in Copenhagen. We put together and agreed to a process of developmental meetings at the officials level, leading to a number of meetings of ministers so that when we get to Copenhagen next December, we will indeed have a Canadian team at that event.

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

2:20 Returning Officer Appointments

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. From June to October 2007 the Chief Electoral Officer wrote repeatedly to the government asking for local returning officer nominees, and the government never even replied. Eventually the PC Party gave him a list of names heavily biased, of course, with PC Party members. My question is to the Deputy Premier, who was intimately involved in this process. How does he justify to this Assembly a policy in which written requests from an officer of this Assembly are ignored and a key responsibility for an election is handed over to a political party?

Mr. Stevens: Well, Mr. Speaker, I must admit that I was here during that time period, but I don't recall the specifics of the question. What I do however remember is that following the election, the hon. member who has asked this question was sufficiently distressed with the circumstances surrounding the election that I think he called for an investigation into the conduct of the officer. So I do note that you weren't particularly pleased with what was going on.

Dr. Taft: You know, Mr. Speaker, that was about as pathetic a response on a serious issue as this Assembly has ever seen. You should be ashamed of yourself.

Again to the same Deputy Premier. When he finally got a list of 83 names, the Chief Electoral Officer discovered that only one

person, 1 out of 83, had been contacted to see if they were interested in the position. How does this minister defend such a pathetic performance on such a crucial matter?

Mr. Stevens: Well, part of the difficulty I'm having in defending anything, Mr. Speaker, is that I don't have specifics of the particular event that the hon. member is asking about. It's incredibly difficult for me to respond to something that I don't at this particular point in time have any recollection of.

Dr. Taft: Ignorance is no defence, Mr. Speaker. This is shocking. This is a matter of profound public policy importance. This minister was intimately involved. He was the minister responsible. He is now the Deputy Premier.

Will the Deputy Premier tell this Assembly – maybe he can get his memory cells going – who it was in the PC Party he asked to provide names to the Chief Electoral Officer? If he won't tell us, why won't he tell us?

Mr. Stevens: Well, Mr. Speaker, what I can say about this hon. member is that ignorance is not a problem when it comes to asking questions in this House. That certainly is true.

I can tell you that I do not answer questions that I don't have a factual basis to answer, and that is the situation I find myself in. The hon. member can say that I should know the answer, and perhaps I should, but I don't know the answer, hon. member, so I can't provide you with one.

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

Student Housing

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The University of Alberta south campus student residence appears to have been mothballed. Meanwhile, students are facing rent increase after rent increase. U of A residence rates went up 10 per cent in 2007, almost 9 per cent last year, and 8 per cent this year. That's almost a 30 per cent rent increase in three years. Postsecondary students deserve accessible, affordable, safe places to live. To the minister of advanced education: why won't you fight for a new undergrad residence at the U of A so students can study and sleep knowing that they'll be able afford to live there next semester, too?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, indeed, we are working with the university and with CAUS and the University of Alberta Students' Union on a number of different proposals: one being the south campus, one being the east village, and a number of other proposals which I'm currently working on with the executive of the University of Alberta. So I don't know where the hon. member is getting her information.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. From the students.

My understanding is that you've got a couple of grad residences online, but there's absolutely nothing in the works for the undergrad residence. Students get \$429 a month from student loans to cover rent, but a suite at the U of A residence goes for almost \$700 a month, and that's \$700 for a building that recently had broken elevators and was infested with bedbugs. As a result, students are working at several jobs and taking on crippling debt to make ends meet. To the same minister: how could you let student costs balloon

in the boom but offer no help to students who were and still are struggling to make ends meet?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I would put the student financial assistance that we provide in this province up against any province in the country. The facts are the facts, and simply that is the truth. The University of Alberta and our department have been working on additions to student residences, and the hon. member is correct on deferred maintenance issues as it relates to that. We guarantee the funds for the loans for student residences, but we do not fund the student residences themselves. The institutions do that as a business case, and we're working with them on several different business cases right now.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The fact is the fact that, basically, students receive about \$300 less a month than they need to get a simple place to live. These days in Alberta the average undergrad student takes six years to complete a four-year degree because they can't afford to study full-time. We know that students who go into debt more than \$10,000 per year have only a 20 per cent chance of completing their degree. Postsecondary students are suffering because this government is putting corporate tax breaks before public education. To the same minister: why won't you commit today to providing real affordable housing for students at the U of A campus, including the south campus residence?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I look after Campus Alberta. I don't as a rule look after the individual campuses and the individual day-to-day operations of those institutions. The University of Alberta has a board, a chair, a provost, a president, and an entire senate that look after the day-to-day operations of the university campus and, as well, the actual infrastructure that's on that. We work with them, and we are working with them today and will continue to work with them throughout Campus Alberta. Accessible, affordable education is a priority of this government.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Tourism Marketing Opportunities

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past weekend the Whitecourt Trailblazers Snowmobile Club and the Alberta Snowmobile Association held their annual jamboree in Whitecourt. Whitecourt and area hosted thousands of riders and guests from throughout the province, from Canada, and from the United States and filled our hotel rooms and restaurants. My question is to the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation. Does your ministry value events like this that happen outside the better-known zones like Jasper and Banff?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The answer to the hon. member is: yes, we do. We were pleased to be able to partner with the Whitecourt Trailblazers and other area businesses to support this event to the tune of about \$40,000, and with that commitment we understand from the early economic returns that it was close to a \$4 million return to this community. As he said, 1,350 rooms were let. We think that's marketing money well spent, and we're doing our best to keep people travelling throughout the province of Alberta even in these uncertain economic times.

Mr. VanderBurg: Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for the support given by the ministry. She mentioned the economics of these kinds of event. During unsettled economic circumstances in the global economy what are you doing to entice people to travel and, more importantly, entice them to communities like mine, that have been hit hard by the economic downturn?

Mrs. Ady: Well, the Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne makes a really good point. Because of the great work of the tourism industry and also Travel Alberta we've really been not doing so bad. When it comes to direct entries, we're faring better than other provinces around us. We're into what I'll call the second year of the Stay campaign, where we encourage Albertans to travel in Alberta and to enjoy this province. We think it's been going very well. It's kept us in a pretty good, solid position compared to others. When we look at last year, at 2008, we think the Stay campaign projected about another 40,000 visits, worth about \$17 million in income, to the province.

Mr. VanderBurg: Mr. Speaker, I'm glad the minister mentioned the Stay program. Over the weekend the hundreds of volunteers expressed an interest to me about an expanded trail system. We need to expand that product here in our province in order to keep people in Alberta. What is the minister doing to expand our trail network in this province?

2:30

Mrs. Ady: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to report that we have been hard at work on the trail system. I've asked the hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater to chair the Recreation Corridors Coordinating Committee, and they're busy at work trying to find goals that create a sustainable network of trails in the province. I know they've had their first meeting, and they're looking for best ways to achieve the goals. We've got hundreds of thousands of Albertans that want out on these trails. They want to recreate in the province of Alberta.

I'm also working together with the minister of sustainable resources on this to help ensure that trails used in Alberta are sustainable and responsible, both public and in parkland.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for Little Bow.

Submetering for Energy Use

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Service Alberta's written responses to the questions asked on submetering last spring showed that instead of taking action, she's leaving it to the landlords to make their own business decisions. This is simply unacceptable. To the Minister of Service Alberta: when will the minister be introducing legislation on submetering to protect renters?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to protecting renters, Service Alberta has a number of programs in place. One of the best ones is the residential tenancies dispute services program, which is a wonderful place for tenants and landlords to come together to solve problems, whether it's relating to rent or things like that. So Service Alberta is very much engaged in protecting renters and making sure renters know that rental increases are only allowed to be given once a year. We are always looking at and wanting to hear back from Albertans on issues they are concerned about.

Mr. Kang: We are talking about unregulated metering, Mr. Speaker. We are not talking about rents. Again to the minister: why is the minister allowing submetering to continue unregulated? Where is the protection for renters while they wait?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to the whole issue of submetering, I am concerned about that issue, as is the hon. member. I have instructed my department to look at that issue and how it relates to the renter. It is federal and provincial jurisdictions, so we are currently looking at that area. I have written a letter to Minister Tony Clement on this issue just to indicate that some of the measurement standards are regulated federally, and we should be looking at those jointly.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When will we get the response on that? Given that the minister wrote that regulations weren't a necessity because landlords have their own incentives to keep costs low, why are the needs of landlords put before renters who are forced to pay submetering charges without protection?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the whole issue of submetering has positives and negatives in that it does encourage renters to be more aware of the costs of energy and those kinds of areas but balances that with respect to landlords being able to give the right information to the tenant so they know what they're getting into. As I said, that's something that I am looking into as we speak, and I'm currently working on developing a tipsheet for consumers so that they know what they're going into when they are faced with this choice.

Abandoned Gas Lines on Deeded Land

Mr. McFarland: Mr. Speaker, recent questions at my constituency office and at a southern Alberta mayors and reeves meeting have been around abandoned pipelines, gas lines, and the associated federal and provincial regulations. My question today is to the Minister of Energy, and I would like him to give me an answer to the question that was asked most frequently. In the event that an oil or gas pipeline is abandoned on deeded land, Minister, what is the landowner's liability?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. Certainly, the patience of the hon. member is appreciated. With respect to provincial legislation around abandonments even after a pipeline in Alberta is abandoned under provincial regulation and an order is issued, the licensee is responsible for the pipeline, and under no circumstance does this responsibility transfer to a landowner.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The second question, that I thought was a most pertinent one: what is the landowner's responsibility and involvement in the abandoned line on deeded land when it's abandoned and going to be reclaimed?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, if a licensee of a pipeline seeks an abandonment order, it must be done through the ERCB. Certainly, there is usually a hearing involved, particularly when there's a directly affected landowner, and the landowners must be notified in advance. At a hearing a landowner would be able to rise and present his concerns with respect to the abandonment process, and the ERCB is required to take these concerns into account.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. McFarland: Thank you. My final question along the same line, Minister: does the original agreement made between a landowner and the resource company with respect to the compensation get altered in the event of an abandonment?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, again, the answer to that question would be: under normal circumstances, no, unless the leaseholder and the landowner had agreed previously that on abandonment the contract would expire. The contract would have terms in it relative to the length of the contract and when the contract would be terminated. Just because the line is abandoned doesn't mean that the contract is null and void. The contract would be in place until such a time as these terms of the contract are completed.

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

Alberta Adolescent Recovery Centre

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday, when questioned about her ministry's responsibility to protect addicted children and youth, the minister flipped the concern to the minister of health, who first blamed CBC for reporting allegations of abuse at the Alberta Adolescent Recovery Centre in Calgary. The health minister then, rather than responding to my questions, accused me of not being supportive of Calgarians, whose concerns I raised. To either minister: whose ministry has the primary responsibility for protecting Alberta's children and youth?

Ms Tarchuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'll reiterate my messaging from yesterday, which is that I will always – and it's my role – encourage people that if they know of children that are being mistreated or abused, they report to me, and I and our ministry will make sure that there is immediate follow-up investigation. I can also say again that we do not license addiction treatment facilities, so anything that has to do with those services I would direct to the minister of health.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Rather than a passive approach of "call me," how about you calling them?

Has either minister begun an investigation into the allegations of abuse raised by the CBC's *The Fifth Estate* or their accountability to taxpayers for the annual grants of \$300,000 to this facility?

Mr. Liepert: This is the second day in a row that this particular member has raised unfounded allegations. If there is a specific allegation, he owes it to call the police. Report it to the police. That's their job. If he doesn't have it, I would suggest that he quit raising it and quit smearing the reputation of an organization in Calgary that is doing outstanding volunteer work.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the ministers, will the Premier remove the cloud of doubt hanging over this facility, over their government's duty to protect the physical and mental well-being of children, and over their fiscal responsibility to Albertans by conducting a public inquiry?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, the only cloud is raised by this member, and it's got a hole in it bigger than the hole in the ozone layer. He continues to raise allegations, has no facts to back it up. All he has is some trash journalism by the CBC out of Toronto.

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

Door-to-door Sales of Energy Contracts

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. People in my constituency tell me that door-to-door salespeople have come to their homes and used questionable tactics to promote and sell energy contracts. Can the Minister of Service Alberta inform the House on what is and isn't allowed when selling energy contracts and how Albertans can be aware of these regulations?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Salespeople who do come to Albertans' homes must abide by the energy marketing regulation. It has specific requirements as to when they can access homes; that is, between the hours of 9 a.m. and 8 p.m. The regulation is very clear, and we do take action if the requirements are not followed. We also have detailed information on the Service Alberta website and the Utilities Consumer Advocate website about the regulations so that Albertans are informed of what door-to-door energy salespeople can do.

Mr. Quest: My first supplemental to the same minister: what options are in place for consumers if they sign an energy contract with a door-to-door salesperson and then change their mind after the salesperson has left?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The best thing Albertans should do is to consider their options very carefully and do their homework before signing an energy contract. However, in the event that someone does change their mind, they have 10 days to cancel the contract and provide notice to the retailer. The contract can be cancelled even if the 10 days have passed, depending on situations. Consumers can call our department, and we're very happy to help them through the process.

2:40

Mr. Quest: My final supplementary to the same minister: what has the office of the Utilities Consumer Advocate done to inform Albertans about what to be aware of when signing an energy contract?

Mrs. Klimchuk: The good work of the Utilities Consumer Advocate and their staff is that they have been very active about informing consumers about door-to-door salespeople. We have calls that come to a call centre, we have good website information, and as well we take calls from consumers. We also successfully mediate disputes, and we work closely with the retailers to ensure they're meeting our regulations. The bottom line is that there are good protections in place, and we will enforce them as well.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 96 questions and responses. In 30 seconds from now I'm going to call upon the first of several hon. members to continue with members' statements.

Members' Statements

(continued)

Diamonds and Denim Sweetheart Gala

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, on Valentine's Day I attended the third annual Diamonds and Denim Sweetheart Gala in Red Deer, a fundraiser to support the vital programs and services of the Canadian Paraplegic Association, Alberta. Alberta businesses, including Mitchell & Jewell of Red Deer, were very generous in supporting the fundraising auction. I was also pleased to see the Member for Red Deer-South and the hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports at the event. Marlin Styner, the chair of the Premier's council on disability, and his wife, Diane, were also present. I would also like to point out the hard work of Paulette Vanoosterom and her amazing group of volunteers, who organized this gala evening.

The Canadian Paraplegic Association, Alberta, helps ensure that Albertans with disabilities have the help and support they need to address their specific issues, giving them a chance to reach their full potential as human beings and active citizens. As an Albertan with a disability I can tell you that I am very grateful to have had such wonderful resources and terrific people to draw upon.

I have served on the CPA board for nine years, and I can tell you from personal experience that I have seen remarkable progress Albertans with disabilities have made in that time. Don't get me wrong. We still have a long way to go when it comes to improving accessibility and availability of opportunity, but many positive steps forward have been made thanks in great part to the folks working at CPA and their generous supporters.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank Paulette and her amazing group of volunteers once again and to offer a shout-out to the fine Albertans who gave generously at the fundraiser.

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

Norma Bastidas

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a great privilege for me to rise today to share an incredible story of an Albertan who is an inspiration for us all. Norma Bastidas lives in southwest Calgary, and she's a single mother of two. Now, her 14-year-old son suffers from cone-rod dystrophy. It's a progressive condition that often results in significant vision loss. Rather than waiting for someone else to do something about this, Norma has taken it upon herself to search to the ends of the earth for a cure.

Along with Operation Eyesight Universal, the Foundation Fighting Blindness, and the Canadian National Institute for the Blind she has launched an initiative to help combat vision loss. Norma is an ultramarathon runner, and to bring attention to a cause that affects more than 160 million people, she will literally run all over the world. Norma will compete in seven ultramarathons on seven continents in seven months, seven-on-seven-in-seven. She will run 1,400 kilometres through some of the most hostile environments: the thick jungles of Brazil, the subzero temperatures of Antarctica, and the hottest deserts on the planet.

When she completes her journey, the 777 Run for Sight, she will be the first person in history to do so. It won't be easy, Mr. Speaker. Ultramarathons are one of the toughest challenges in sports. The first race alone is equal to running up and down Mount Everest. In this effort Norma will express how lucky we are to have the gift of

sight and how we need to share our good fortune with others who need support in dealing with vision loss. The project will focus on helping to find the causes and ultimately the cure for inherited retinal diseases that cause vision loss. Twenty-five years ago finding a cure for retinal dystrophies was considered impossible, but today research has led to promising treatments to prevent and in some cases even restore vision. People can follow along on normabastidas.com in her quest for \$100,000.

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

Labour Mobility of Land Surveyors

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my privilege to rise today and relate one of the first of many success stories to come from the trade, investment, and labour mobility agreement, commonly referred to by its acronym, TILMA. The Alberta Land Surveyors' Association and the Association of British Columbia Land Surveyors have recently announced that the first Alberta land surveyor to apply under the new TILMA rules has completed and passed the jurisdictional examination for British Columbia and will be commissioned as a British Columbia land surveyor at the annual general meeting of the Association of B.C. Land Surveyors being held next week in Vancouver. Congratulations go out to Richard Nixon, Alberta land surveyor from Fort St. John, B.C.

Both associations signed an agreement on April 26 of last year that provides for the labour mobility of their members as of January 1 of this year. This agreement complies with the trade, investment, and labour mobility agreement of the two provinces. Under this agreement, Mr. Speaker, a land surveyor in good standing in one association may apply to become a land surveyor in the other association and will have to write a nonmaterial jurisdictional examination. By writing and passing this nonmaterial examination, the land surveyor will prove that he or she is knowledgeable in the statutes, regulations, and survey practices of the other province. Once completed, the land surveyor will be sworn in as a commissioned land surveyor in the other jurisdiction. This revised process for entry will ensure compliance with both provinces' labour mobility requirements in a fair and transparent process for land surveyors in each province. The two associations are looking forward to working together in this new relationship to share ideas and projects to save time and resources in ongoing activities.

The Alberta Land Surveyors' Association and the Association of British Columbia Land Surveyors are the self-governing professional associations established by provincial legislation. The associations regulate the practice of land surveying for the protection of the public and the administration of the profession.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Bill 15

Dunvegan Hydro Development Act

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to request leave to introduce Bill 15, being the Dunvegan Hydro Development Act.

Mr. Speaker, on December 22, 2008, an independent joint review panel determined that the Dunvegan hydroelectric project, a 100-megawatt run-of-the-river hydroelectric project on the Peace River is in the public interest. Our own Hydro and Electric Energy Act requires that a bill be prepared in order to authorize a construction order for the hydro development. Passage of Bill 15 would authorize the Alberta Utilities Commission to make an order for the construc-

tion and operation of Glacier Power Ltd.'s Dunvegan hydroelectric project. While this act meets our legislative requirements to grant the appropriate authority to the Alberta Utilities Commission, it does not remove any of the regulatory duties of that body.

Mr. Speaker, this is a good-news story. Renewable energy production already accounts for 13 per cent of Alberta's total electricity generation. This project will add to that total.

[Motion carried; Bill 15 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 15 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

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

2:50 **Bill 16**
Peace Officer Amendment Act, 2009

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to request leave to introduce Bill 16, the Peace Officer Amendment Act, 2009.

Mr. Speaker, effective May 1, 2009, the Peace Officer Act will restrict the use of terms and symbols used to represent auxiliary or volunteer police officers to differentiate them from sworn police officers. An unintended consequence is that auxiliary policing programs are required to make changes to their uniforms and insignia, incurring extra costs. The proposed amendment would allow police services to ask for an exemption to this section of the act so that similar uniforms and titles can be used within the same police service when both auxiliary and police constables attend scenes together. Making the amendment now ensures police services or auxiliary police programs don't incur these additional costs.

[Motion carried; Bill 16 read a first time]

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

Bill 17
Securities Amendment Act, 2009

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce Bill 17, the Securities Amendment Act, 2009.

Alberta and all the provinces and territories in Canada with the exception of Ontario have made a commitment to ongoing reform and harmonization of our securities regulation under the 2004 provincial-territorial memorandum of understanding regarding securities regulation. Bill 17 builds on this work, Mr. Speaker, and Alberta has taken a leadership role to further modernize, harmonize, and streamline Alberta securities law.

Mr. Speaker, thank you. I look forward to the further debate and discussion on this issue as we move forward.

[Motion carried; Bill 17 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

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

[Motion carried]

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

Bill 201
Traffic Safety (Vehicles with Unlawfully Possessed Firearms) Amendment Act, 2009

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce private member's Bill 201, the Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2009.

The purpose of this amendment is to stem the tide of gang and gun violence in our towns and cities. These additions to the Traffic Safety Act will make it an offence to drive on a highway in a motor vehicle in which there is an unlawfully possessed firearm. Provided that the police officer has reasonable grounds to believe an offence has been committed, they may request the surrender of the driver's licence and detain the vehicle. The licence suspension is for a 24-hour period, and the vehicle is impounded for the same length of time. At this time the government may use new legislation provisions to rescind the individual's driver's licence for up to one year and fine the individual up to \$25,000.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the table officers, members of our staff, and everyone who aided in the creation of Bill 201 for their assistance. Thank you very much.

[Motion carried; Bill 201 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and to table a list of 150 students from J.C. Charyk school in Hanna in the constituency of Drumheller-Stettler. These students have written this Assembly asking for a prohibition on the sale of flavoured tobacco products in Alberta. I just briefly have a quote here that they indicate is from a U.S. smokeless tobacco executive: "Cherry Skoal is for someone who likes the taste of candy, if you know what I'm saying." I have five copies here which I will pass to the Clerk. I think we should congratulate these students on their initiative in writing our Assembly.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past Saturday, Valentine's Day, the hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, the MLA for Calgary-Mountain View, and I participated in the first annual march to honour the lives of more than a hundred Alberta women murdered or missing over the last 10 years. Among the names of the women remembered were: Sharene Oswald, Jane and Kathryn Johnson, Mary Jane Serloin, Barbara Eyapaise, Starr Solway and her daughter Daniha, Christine Ackabee, Annette Leger, Elaine Krauscher, Sheila Ritchie, Joanne Shover, and Shauna Vanderbosch.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of my colleague the Leader of the Official Opposition I have two tablings today. The first is a letter from Paul Hawirko, who notes that he's approaching his 80th birthday and has been moved to write a letter expressing his concern, which he sees as an assault on the drug coverage benefits available to seniors in Alberta. He would like to see that changed.

The second tabling on behalf of the Leader of the Official Opposition is from Wayne Hampton, who resides in Lacombe, who is also expressing his vehement opposition to the proposed changes in the Alberta government's pharmaceutical strategy.

Thank you very much.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of 10 reports from long-term care workers indicating specific instances of shifts that were short-staffed. One of these reports shows that because of short-staffing residents missed baths, were fed late, and were not toileted when needed.

The second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is the appropriate number of copies of 105 letters from residents of Newton Place, a University of Alberta residence, which relates to my questions today. The letters highlight the lack of affordable housing for U of A students.

Thank you.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Goudreau, Minister of Employment and Immigration, pursuant to the Architects Act the Alberta Association of Architects annual report, 2007.

Orders of the Day

Government Motions

3. Mr. Hancock moved:

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

The Speaker: Hon. members, neither motions 3 nor 4 are debatable. I'll call the question on the motion put forward by the hon. Government House Leader.

[Government Motion 3 carried]

4. Mr. Hancock moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly do resolve itself into Committee of Supply, when called, to consider supply to be granted to Her Majesty.

[Government Motion 4 carried]

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.

[Adjourned debate February 17: Mr. Lukaszuk]

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, do you wish to continue?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, just a couple of words in summation to what I had the pleasure of saying yesterday on the speech. It is very important that we as leaders in this Assembly focus on the positives that are happening in the province of Alberta. If we as elected officials representing our constituents in this Chamber cannot focus on the positive and cannot underline what great work not only this government but this Chamber as a whole and all Albertans have done and how far ahead we are of all jurisdictions, it would be very difficult to expect that of Albertans in turn.

Mr. Speaker, we're at a time right now when we need to pull together and when we need to show the strength of Alberta and when we need to forge new markets and when we need to market Alberta in foreign markets. The world is watching us. If we're here knocking down the work of this government, if we're here knocking down, in turn, the work of Albertans, I am not sure what kind of a picture we are painting in front of the rest of this world. Hence, I suggest to you and through you to all members of this Assembly that when discussing the Speech from the Throne, we should perhaps focus on the realities and less on the partisan objectives and highlight the positives and the opportunities that exist in this province because it is indeed a province like no other in this country and like no other state further south of us.

The Speech from the Throne definitely is meant to inspire Albertans, it's meant to boost our economy, and it's meant to show all Albertans and the world that this province is open for business, that this province is going to develop its natural resources in a very responsible way, that this province is going to take care of those who need assistance but will not do any of that frivolously. This province will continue with a very sound small "c" conservative fiscal plan, and this province will be probably, if not definitely, the first one to rebound from this economic turmoil that we're in.

Mr. Speaker, with this, I will close my comments and tell you that I have confidence in all members in this chamber and in this government that we will lead Alberta through this turbulent but also challenging time full of opportunities.

Thank you.

3:00

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

Mr. Renner: Thank you. I'm very pleased to rise today to respond to the Speech from the Throne, delivered by His Honour on February 10. Mr. Speaker, let me say that it's my pleasure to respond to the speech both as a proud Albertan and as the Environment minister.

In these uncertain times when we face so many unknowns, what we do know for sure is that this government remains committed to managing the environment for now and for our future. Albertans take great pride in our land, our ecosystems, and our natural resources. It transcends government, communities, and the economy. Our love of the land is as Albertan as this building or cowboys or, indeed, free spirit. It's simply a part of who we are.

Managing our impact on the land is very much what my department is all about. One of the phrases used in the speech resonated strongly with me; I think it really captured what Alberta Environment is all about. His Honour talked about conducting business with an environmental footprint that grows lighter and lighter over time. Mr. Speaker, I couldn't agree more.

Everything we do has some impact. Every change we go through, economic or otherwise, has some impact. We recognize that Alberta has changed. The province is growing. More people, more demand for Alberta resources means that our proverbial footprint is larger. It's the reality of today's Alberta. Society as a whole will dictate the

size of the foot. It's really beyond the scope of any government or any industry. What we can control, however, Mr. Speaker, is how deep that footprint goes. Alberta Environment is doing just that. Albertans have told us that this is what they want.

As I said before, we share a common pride for the natural beauty of Alberta and the diversity of our environment. Albertans value a high quality of life. Some people may think it's a choice between one and the other. We know that both can be achieved by finding the right balance, and we know that Albertans demand both from us. Don't get me wrong, Mr. Speaker. Finding this balance is a continuous work in progress. We don't have all of the answers in the Ministry of Environment. We never have had, and frankly we never will. But we are focusing our efforts to get better every day and to make sure that with every step we take, we move further and further down the right path. Albertans would accept nothing less.

Albertans want to know that someone is considering all the impacts of a development when making decisions, so we are and in a way we have never done before. Alberta is pioneering new tools and approaches that will determine what our environment can handle and how we manage within those limits. This approach takes us beyond project-by-project planning. It considers all sectors that exist on a landscape: residential, agricultural, industrial, and commercial. At the same time it balances these sectors with what is required to maintain an ecosystem. Ecosystems, Mr. Speaker, are interconnected, and so should be our planning.

Our air emissions will be capped to ensure that air emissions remain safe and that our air remains safe to breathe. Water withdrawals will be limited to protect aquatic systems. Land disturbances will be minimized by putting the right developments in the right places. Just as importantly, all of us will know what these thresholds are. We can ensure that we live and work within these limits.

The cumulative effects approach is already in place in the Industrial Heartland. Our ministry is taking what we are learning in the heartland and will be applying it throughout the rest of the province. Much of our ministry's work on cumulative effects is happening behind the scenes, changing the internal processes and policy reviews to ensure that we align the department to this new approach. We're examining our own environmental impact assessment process to determine how we can reimagine it to fit under cumulative effects planning.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans want to take action against climate change, and they want us to show that we are part of the global solution, so we will continue to refine our greenhouse gas emission regulations, which are already the first of its kind in North America. We've always said that we have much more to do in this area, and we're going to act on that commitment.

Alberta is in a unique role as a global energy supplier. We have the ability to produce energy the world demands, but with that we are also the largest emitter of greenhouse gases in Canada. So Albertans have a challenge ahead of us. We're ready and willing to do our part, but climate change is not just Alberta's issue; it belongs to everyone who drives a car, heats a home, or buys consumer goods. Any climate change strategy must reflect this reality. It must take steps to limit emissions at all points in the fossil fuel life cycle, not just the production side. This is why we'll continue to focus on reducing the emissions that come from the production of energy in Alberta, especially those that come from the oil sands, while also taking action to promote wise energy use, such as the consumer incentive program that we will be introducing and announcing soon.

We've made great strides, but this is a race that's just getting started, Mr. Speaker, and we know we have much more to do. Technology investment is priority one. It provides long-term

solutions to how we can reduce emissions and make energy production more efficient. An investment in technology development here at home is also an investment in jobs in our economy. It shows the rest of the world that we take our responsibility as a global energy supplier seriously.

Decisions that will soon be made on how to invest the \$2 billion earmarked for carbon capture and storage will be announced. While carbon capture and storage alone will not solve the world's greenhouse gas emission issue, it's a critical and important tool in our tool box. It has the support of the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and, as we heard last night, the Obama administration. This is where we have much to offer. Frankly, I think we have the most to offer, Mr. Speaker, not only to make real, lasting emission reductions in Alberta but to take what we learn in the coming years and share this valuable knowledge with others. For a province of 3 and a half million people to commit this significant amount of dollars is a tremendous commitment to the world, particularly in times like these.

This year will be an important one for climate change policy in North America. President Obama is meeting our Prime Minister tomorrow. Climate change will certainly be on the agenda, and speculation persists that Canada will be looking for some sort of free pass for the oil sands. Let me be clear, Mr. Speaker, to you and to all Albertans that Canada and Alberta are not looking for a free pass. The oil sands do not receive a free pass from our own regulatory system, and we don't expect one from a North American system.

What we do want, Mr. Speaker, is a common North American system that respects jurisdictional differences and efforts under way. We expect our \$2 billion commitment to CCS to be recognized. So, too, would be our regulatory system that directed and led to real emissions, a price on carbon, and an offset credit market. A system that works for one place does not necessarily work for another. Each province and each state has its own challenges and its own means to find solutions, and everybody has a set of experience and expertise to bring to the table. But it can be one that shares the same common outcome: real, lasting emission reductions. For Alberta this means that money generated by an emission regulatory system should stay here where it can nurture the greatest change.

3:10

Let me talk for a few moments, Mr. Speaker, about water. Albertans want to know that there will be enough water in the future for people, for ecosystems, and for the economy. It is by far the greatest environmental concern for many Albertans. Living on the prairies, Albertans realize how important the supply of fresh water is. Like other natural resources water must be managed appropriately.

In 2003 we introduced water for life. At the time it was a groundbreaking framework for a province in the northern hemisphere. In five years it has accomplished much. Our knowledge of Alberta's water systems has increased dramatically. We've forged many partnerships with on-the-ground organizations across the province. We've made safe drinking water even safer. But with every accomplishment another challenge arises, so we are implementing the renewed water for life strategy. We're going to look at important and, in many ways, challenging questions about how we allocate and use this valuable resource. Priorities coming forward will include continuing to find ways to support regional drinking water and waste water solutions, managing and understanding the health of our aquatic ecosystems, and building our water monitoring and evaluation public reporting through the Water Information Centre so that Albertans know the state of their water.

Renewed water for life is also setting the stage for dealing with two converging fundamental truths about water in Alberta: on one hand, our growing population and an economy that continues to put upward pressure on the demand for water; on the other hand, Mr. Speaker, scientists agree that a warming climate in Alberta will probably mean less supply available in the future. These converging themes are taking our water management planning in new directions. Alberta will ensure that we have the right system to manage the balance with these realities. We have a system that has served us well, but it's time that we take a hard look and ask ourselves if it will still serve us into the future.

More than anything else, Mr. Speaker, Albertans want balance. They want a robust economy but not at the expense of the environment. They want confidence that the land they love will be the land that they pass on to future generations. That is our goal, and it's a goal that I am very proud to be part of meeting.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciated the comments from the minister. I think the minister knows that on this side we share the vision, or at least we have the vision of developing the oil sands but in a sustainable, sensible manner. I'm sure the minister has that same vision.

My question is particular to oil sands development and habitat protection. The plan released the other day – I don't have a copy in front of me – what was it called? Responsible directions or something, you know, the big plan released the other day that talks specifically about committing to habitat protection and to working with groups like CEMA.

Now, CEMA last year made a recommendation, endorsed by industry and environmentalists, to set aside, protect from development some areas in the oil sands region. Despite a strong, comprehensive recommendation the government denied that. So I see a gap between the commitment to CEMA that the minister talks about and the commitment to habitat protection and the actual actions of this government which overrule the recommendations of CEMA. I'd be interested if the minister can tell us how this government is moving. Is it for CEMA or against CEMA?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think it's clear. It's important to understand that what is so fundamentally important about the oil sands strategy, in addition to what is specifically within it, is that this strategy provides the framework for a number of different ministries throughout government to work together, to have the framework to know that no longer is it acceptable for Environment to head off in one direction, Energy in another direction, and SRD, for example, in a third direction. This is the document that brings it all together.

To specifically address the member's question, we have before us the land-use framework, which is under the direction of the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development, referred to in the oil sands strategy document. That process has within its own regulatory regime and within its own process right as we speak a board that has been struck to talk about land-use issues in the lower Athabasca. That will, among many other things, be the way that the issue that the member refers to can be addressed. At the same time Alberta Environment will be talking about issues related to water, groundwater, ecosystems around water. We can guide and bring what we need from a scientific, environmental point of view by way of advice into that regional planning.

That's, I think, what the member and what Albertans have to understand is so monumental in bringing forward this overall strategy: not specifically what's in the strategy but what the strategy brings to the planning process. It brings a commitment on the part of government and the tools necessary so that we have cross-government initiatives, cross-government planning. This is a government of Alberta planning document, not an Alberta Environment or an SRD document. This is across all departments. That's what I'm looking forward to working on.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is still available. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I have three questions for the minister. You mentioned water for life, which is a legacy of former Minister Taylor, which I very much appreciate. What percentage of aquifer mapping have we accomplished to date? That's my first question.

Also, the government and the opposition have different views about capping intensity versus capping overall emissions. The government has committed \$2 billion toward sequestration. What practical steps have been taken to ensure that that process begins?

Then just a fairly simple question as number three. Is Sustainable Resource Development the quarterback for all ministries in balancing resource, environmental, and economic issues? Are they the chief ministry?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I thought I just made myself clear.

The Speaker: Well, I'm sorry, hon. member, but the time apportionment has now left us.

Hon. Minister of Energy, did you wish to participate?

Mr. Knight: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I do wish to participate. I'm very pleased to take the opportunity today to respond to the throne speech. As His Honour the Honourable Lieutenant Governor made very clear in his speech, I believe that this is a speech for our times. Alberta is not immune from the global economic slowdown and the challenges facing all sectors of the economy. Now more than ever Alberta needs a plan to help our province respond to the challenges of today while positioning us to succeed during the year to come. I believe that the tone and direction are not only in the throne speech but also in the provincial energy strategy, which was released last December.

His Honour indicated in the throne speech that our goal must be to provide the energy the world needs – the energy the world needs – with an environmental footprint that grows lighter and lighter over time. Mr. Speaker, the energy strategy puts us on a path to do exactly that. As the Energy minister I'd like to focus for a couple of minutes on a couple of the things that are in the energy strategy.

3:20

First, as was clearly outlined in the throne speech, our goal over the coming year will be to ensure that our province remains a competitive and secure place to invest and do business. We will maintain the high quality of life that Albertans have come to expect, and that will depend in large part on the continued responsible development of energy resources. Mr. Speaker, we've heard a lot of comments, often from across the way, that criticize the way that this province addresses these issues. I think it's very important to look a little more closely at the plans and at exactly what we have put in place.

As you know, to name a few, the plan that we have relative to responsible development includes air quality – first in legislation,

first in regulation – a working model that has reduced 2.6 million tonnes of emissions into Alberta’s atmosphere. Water for life and the new water for life: a plan that’s working today to decrease the amount of fresh water and brackish water used in energy industries and in other industries in the province. The latest land-use framework and the oil sands strategy, with mandates to assist developers, overarched by the energy strategy, will last this province for three decades of solid, responsible development. Mr. Speaker, all of these policies will work together to ensure that Alberta’s energy resources are developed in a way that pays close attention to the impact on individuals and our environment.

When we talk about the environment, the biggest challenge, of course, that we have in the immediate future are greenhouse gas emissions and climate change. We strongly believe that we can mitigate these impacts with the advancement of what we would like to call the science of solutions, carbon capture and storage being one of them, another key topic that was mentioned in the throne speech. As you know, Mr. Speaker, this government has committed \$2 billion to carbon capture and storage to develop three to five large projects. Keep in mind that the province of Alberta, about 3.2 million people, committed \$2 billion to CCS projects. The President of the United States has recently indicated that they will commit \$2.5 billion to projects for carbon capture and storage development. That represents a \$2.5 billion investment for about 350 million people. The province of Alberta will justly be seen as a global leader with respect to this issue.

In short order, Mr. Speaker, we believe that we will have legislation to formally commit to the funding, and we have a development council currently finalizing research with respect to the issue. Make no mistake: Alberta is on the international radar, and this throne speech sends a strong, clear message to those audiences.

Again, Mr. Speaker, we’re very, very pleased to hear the President’s comments and particularly his recognition of the enormous benefit that carbon capture and storage can have on a global problem. To me it’s further proof that Alberta is on the right path. We’ve seen a lot of rhetoric about our province directed toward the President in recent weeks, but his comments make it clear to me that he’s a thoughtful leader interested in real solutions.

I was also pleased to see his comments relative to clean coal because, as you know, Mr. Speaker, the use of technology to sustain our economies, which, of course, is a key focus of the provincial energy strategy, deals with coal as well. This message is so important now, especially during a time of economic slowdown. Now is the time to find ways to sustain our province’s economy. How will we do that? We will do that by moving forward with the key outcomes of the provincial energy strategy. We will pursue clean energy production. That doesn’t only mean seeing enhancements in things like renewable energy, including projects like the hydro legislation being considered before the House. More importantly, clean energy production means finding better ways to produce our vast energy resources and ways that we can market these improvements to other jurisdictions. It means exploring clean coal technology, bioenergy, gasification, in situ development, and so on.

We will also focus, Mr. Speaker, on wise energy use, something that is referenced in the throne speech and which I along with the Environment minister are dedicated to working on for the benefit of all Albertans and, we think, Canadians and people around the world. By securing the outcomes from this work, we believe that we will sustain Alberta’s future. Make no mistake: I believe that energy remains the driver of this province, and if we can find solutions to enable our province to develop resources in an environmentally responsible way, we will continue to have a steady stream of

revenue and economic activity and wealth generation that will benefit Alberta for years to come.

Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for the opportunity.

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

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Again, I appreciate the minister participating in this discussion and responding to the throne speech. He alluded, indirectly at least, to some of the differences of views on both sides of the Assembly, but I think in important ways there are common desires as well. The minister used the phrase, referring to the throne speech, about Alberta having the energy the world needs. Fair enough. I like to look at this from a different perspective, which is not thinking about Alberta having to deliver the energy the world needs but healthy development that Alberta needs. I think that’s what the government should be about.

My question, just elaborating on that, to the Minister of Energy is just concerning royalties. There has been an awful lot of debate around royalties in the last couple of years, and we’ve all had an earful or several earfuls on this one. Is the minister satisfied that the people of Alberta are now in a position to get the best value for the bitumen that’s being produced from the oil sands through the royalty system? Is the royalty system as it is now – it has settled down – delivering the best possible value for the people of Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister if you wish.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, the question is, I think, quite pointed and, I would suggest to you, very easy for me to answer because the short answer to the question is absolutely. A few of the issues around what we’ve done recently in my opinion enhanced the opportunity for Albertans with respect to their participation and their ownership of the resource.

I would point to one, just to answer the hon. member’s question, and that is bitumen royalty in kind. I think that as we look out over the next decade and we look at the opportunity that Albertans will have relative to bitumen royalty in kind, what this does in fact is put Albertans as citizens of this province in control of someplace in the range of 20 to 25 per cent of bitumen production over time. As these projects mature, move into their second phase of the royalty structure, we’re talking here about hundreds of thousands of barrels of bitumen production on a daily basis that will be handled by the province of Alberta for the people. So do I believe that we moved in the right direction? Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. I certainly do.

The Speaker: Others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. In his response to the Speech from the Throne the hon. Leader of the Opposition, the MLA for Calgary-Mountain View, made the point that Alberta is more than the world’s gas station. I would question the minister as to our priorities. Are our human resources more important, or do they take first place over our nonrenewable resources? I would specifically give the example of the small town of Tomahawk, where sour gas is being drilled within the emergency evacuation zone because of the ERCB’s approval to drill for this sour gas. We need to have a balance, obviously, between economics, environment, and human resources. Could you attempt to answer the question: should Alberta’s first priority be our human resource served by our nonrenewable resource, or is the tail wagging the dog in this case?

3:30

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, my first response to that particular bit of rambling, I might say, is that I actually have a 12 gauge at home that spreads wider than that, but I'm not sure how much wider. Nevertheless, there were a number of questions in there. I don't know which one it is that I'm actually supposed to address.

Mr. Speaker, I'll start with the first one relative to Alberta being the world's gas pump. I would suggest to the hon. member that Alberta doesn't even produce enough gas for our own requirements, never mind the world's, so, you know, I'm not sure what the thrust of that was.

Mr. Speaker, relative to the development of the energy industry in the province of Alberta, we have in the province of Alberta . . .

The Speaker: Alas, hon. minister, the time has expired.

The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Allred: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise as the Member for St. Albert to speak in favour of the Speech from the Throne given by His Honour the Lieutenant Governor. As we commence the second session of the 27th Legislature, it is essential that this government continue on its steady course. We must invest in our province and its people while maintaining fiscal prudence in our spending.

Mr. Speaker, I think the Speech from the Throne demonstrates the importance of this balance as we push forward. With a number of planned projects and investments across the province and a variety of important interests we must continue to be mindful of the short- and long-term implications of our funding decisions. Some of these projects that I'm particularly mindful of are projects like the northwest section of the Anthony Henday ring road and the P3 funding for our new schools. These are projects that are required to serve the needs of the growing capital region, and St. Albert is certainly supportive of both projects.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Alberta is well positioned financially compared to many jurisdictions, but we must not take our good fortune for granted. We must invest strategically in infrastructure and other capital projects to secure the prosperity of our province for many years to come, and we must acknowledge the hard work of Albertans in building our great province.

Mr. Speaker, during the last election campaign there was a lot said about plans, particularly in the negative, that the Premier did not have a plan. This Speech from the Throne clearly demonstrates that the Premier does have a plan, in fact a lot of plans, a lot of good plans. There are plans for health care, such as Vision 20/20, plans to end homelessness, the provincial energy strategy, the climate change strategy, water for life, and the land-use framework, to name a few. As well, last week the President of the Treasury Board released a plan for Alberta's oil sands. This brings me back to the days of Great Canadian Oil Sands in 1963, when I did the original topographic survey and was witness to that area prior to any development.

Today one of things that particularly irks me is the frequent reference to dirty oil by members on my far left and short-sighted environmental groups. Mr. Speaker, that gooeey substance is not dirty oil; it is, in fact, oily dirt, and it has been there as part of the landscape around the Athabasca River and beyond for centuries. In fact, in 1783 the explorer Peter Pond was led by natives to the place where they gathered this gooeey substance to waterproof their canoes.

It is only in the past 50 years that we have learned how to capture it and upgrade it into a viable, marketable commercial product.

Mr. Speaker, this oily dirt plays a significant role in the future of this province, and we need to continue to improve our methods of extraction and upgrading, taking into consideration any potential environmental impacts. We can and we will improve our techniques through proper planning, taking into consideration all relevant factors. The Speech from the Throne addresses both the economic and the environmental considerations relevant to the Athabasca oil sands, Alberta's most important natural resource, that will sustain our province and our economy in the years ahead of us.

I'd now like to turn to another issue that is of concern in my constituency and I'm sure in many others, and that is the concern of seniors. Seniors have in many cases lived here their whole lives. We also have families who have firm roots in this province and are spreading their branches today, growing a strong and enthusiastic new generation of Albertans ready to embrace the many challenges on the horizon. Mr. Speaker, seniors must be able to maintain a fair standard of living. We must remember that seniors are becoming a larger portion of the population, especially with so many baby boomers on the verge of retirement. However, we must keep in mind the needs of all Albertans and avoid prioritizing one group at the expense of another. Therefore, we must be mindful of our spending to ensure efficient use of our money for seniors while we also invest in our younger generations and build on the opportunities for Alberta's future.

I recently read a book by Sherry Cooper, the chief economist for the Bank of Montreal, called *The New Retirement*, which talks about the growing number of baby boomer retirees, that will peak by the year 2025. This is not necessarily a new revelation. Her analysis reminded me of another book, *Boom, Bust, & Echo* by David Foot, which was written some 10 years ago and described the very same phenomena. Ms Cooper, however, takes the analysis one step further and describes the effects of this wave of retirees on the labour and financial markets and talks about what this new retirement will look like to both retirees and society in general. I find her points especially relevant to our economic situation today. With the increasing potential for seniors to live longer and enjoy more prosperous times, some interesting challenges arise that we must consider carefully in Alberta as our baby boomers retire. As I said, issues for seniors are amongst the most common concerns I hear from my constituents in St. Albert, so I think that an innovative analysis like Cooper has made in her book can provide insight that will be very useful for our province.

While seniors certainly deserve great facilities and great health care as they move along in age, we must ensure that our programs are well planned and our spending commitments do not unduly constrain our spending priorities in the future. Young people just starting out in the workforce, for example, will be the support base for years to come. Today we have 10 workers for every retiree. In another 10 to 15 years we will have only five workers supporting that same retiree. These young people will contribute significantly to the prosperity we so thankfully enjoy, and in turn we must support their opportunities and recognize that we will be relying on the younger generation to support us in the future. This is why it is so important to be balanced in our approach, Mr. Speaker. We must maintain an ethic of care for our seniors while also acknowledging our responsibilities to future generations.

Mr. Speaker, the Speech from the Throne has indicated that our expenditures must reflect these priorities, and we must ensure that we do not put the next generation back in debt. The matters related to seniors in the Speech from the Throne, such as Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act and the Protection for Persons in

Care Amendment Act, are some of the necessary government measures that ensure the well-being of seniors, so I will be pleased to support them.

3:40

The throne speech also talked about a strong and sustainable health care system. Providing adequate health care is another important priority. People are living longer, and new medical technology allows people to live longer, more productive, and healthier lives. Unfortunately, advances in medical technology never seem to bring the cost of health care down, unlike technological advances in other fields of endeavour. I am confident that we can improve service delivery through innovative thinking and efficient management of technology.

One area, Mr. Speaker, where we can reduce the cost of health care is through the promotion of wellness and prevention. We must do everything we can to ensure wellness from an early age, developing good nutritional habits and keeping fit with proper exercise to prevent those illnesses that creep up on us as we age. The catch health program, for example, is one we can all participate in. It can be fun and need not be expensive.

Health information is also important, Mr. Speaker. Bill 52, the Health Information Amendment Act, 2008, is one such example of this government's commitment to enhanced service delivery and research through accurate and complete electronic records and improved information flow. Accurate and current health histories are so important these days for a number of reasons. Should we have a mishap while on vacation, for example, it is essential that our health records be available for medical treatment in an emergency. Medical information can also be a boon to tracking and detecting disease that is geographically related. With up-to-date medical data and geographic information systems we will be able to monitor and detect the outbreak and spread of disease and catch epidemics in their infancy. I fully agree with the intent of this bill, but the privacy concerns must be adequately addressed. By working with stakeholders such as the Alberta Medical Association and other health care practitioners, we can ensure continued improvements for a patient-focused health care system.

The Speech from the Throne emphasized the need for us to have a plan that allows us to maintain our course in the current global climate and to build a springboard for sustainable, diversified, long-term growth. This is our commitment to all Albertans. Programs such as the affordable housing and Alberta Works programs mentioned in the throne speech will help ensure the long-term sustainability of success for individual Albertans. Mr. Speaker, I'm glad to see in the throne speech that the government is committed to effective social spending along with a renewed commitment to fiscal prudence as called for in the Mintz report. It is critical that the long term remains a priority.

Mr. Speaker, it is evident from the throne speech that our government's priorities go beyond our finances, recognizing the ever-important role of our military. I am proud to call many military personnel my constituents, including my oldest son, who recently retired from the military after 20 years. It is through their great sacrifice that we are able to assemble here today in peace and debate the Speech from the Throne. In return for their great sacrifice we must support them and help them in any way we can. This is why Bill 1, Employment Standards (Reservist Leave) Amendment Act, 2009, which was highlighted in the Speech from the Throne, is something I'm very proud to support.

This bill will ensure that a reservist will be reinstated into the position he or she held prior to their leave or into a comparable position at their civilian jobs whenever possible when they return.

A reservist's challenges do not cease when they come home. Their civilian job should not have to be another sacrifice while serving this country. Mr. Speaker, we must remember that reservists are often called out not just for overseas duties, but they also stand on guard in the event of natural disasters or other emergency situations.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud to support the Speech from the Throne. The items presented in this speech demonstrate diligence, balance, and support for those who need that support. I'm confident that the vision laid out in the Speech from the Throne will make sure that Alberta continues to be well situated for years to come.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of comments or questions. Does any hon. member want to take that?

Seeing none, now I would recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great honour to rise today and respond to the Speech from the Throne delivered by His Honour the Lieutenant Governor Norman Kwong. There's no question that Albertans face global economic uncertainty, and I'm proud that this government has presented a bold, future-oriented vision to address this challenge.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that the very strength and the foundation of our economy comes from the success of small businesses and entrepreneurs, and I'm pleased that the throne speech acknowledged the importance of providing an environment where they may continue to thrive. I'm confident that we will accomplish this goal by maintaining competitive taxes, building the infrastructure that will facilitate growth, educating our youth, and fostering research and development.

Due to the prudent fiscal management of this government Albertans and Alberta businesses currently enjoy the lowest taxes in Canada. Furthermore, the elimination of health care premiums this year will save Alberta families up to \$1,056 and up to \$528 for individuals. This timely and substantive tax relief will no doubt provide a welcome stimulus to our economy.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud of this government's continuing commitment to building infrastructure that provides jobs and ensures our high standards of living and facilitates our economic growth. A major component of this infrastructure strategy is the municipal sustainability initiative. This initiative, a 10-year program, was designed to provide long-term, predictable funding for capital projects identified by municipal councils. Under the program guidelines this can include roadways, bridges, railway, or light rail transit infrastructure. In 2007, when the program launched, \$400 million was provided to municipalities, and funding increased it to \$500 million in the 2008 fiscal year. This funding is scheduled to increase to \$1.4 billion per fiscal year by 2010.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans are reaping the benefits of this program. Edmonton alone is scheduled to receive \$2.2 billion over the next two years. Projects have included waste management facilities and recreation facilities. As a proud Edmontonian I'm enthusiastic about the possibilities infrastructure provides for citizens and businesses. For example, the ongoing construction of the Anthony Henday ring road will connect all corners of our great city, allowing for free flow of goods and services. I commend this government and our Premier for their forward-thinking commitment to building the infrastructure that will ensure our place as an economic leader in this country.

Mr. Speaker, we must continue to ensure that Albertans are the best educated and skilled workers in the world. By doing so, Alberta will continue to be a beacon for investment while attracting the best

and the brightest to lead the industries of the future. To this end I am enthusiastic that this government announced a new initiative called Inspiring Education, that will look at ways to develop educational opportunities for children. In addition, the government intends to work with our world-class postsecondary institutions to prepare young Albertans for the next generation economy. We will do this by implementing a new funding formula that will align our resources in areas that support market labour demands and future opportunities.

3:50

This government will also work to provide the tools for our educated workforce to harness their entrepreneurial spirit. The Alberta research and innovation act will strengthen and align the entire research and innovation system to better assist aspiring entrepreneurs in realizing their dreams.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud to serve in a government that had laid forth a bold strategy that will keep our economy on the right track in these uncertain times while embracing future opportunities. By providing a world-class education, low taxes, investing in infrastructure, research, and development, we will continue to promote the entrepreneurial spirit that will keep Alberta strong and free.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: There are five minutes for comments and questions.

Seeing none, I now recognize the hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to respond to the Speech from the Throne delivered by His Honour the Lieutenant Governor a few days ago. Listening to the Speech from the Throne, I was reminded yet again how from humble beginnings this great province has grown into the best place on earth to live, work, and play. Alberta has always been a place of opportunity, drawing in people from across the country and the world.

In October 1966 my father, a veterinarian, arrived from the U.K. He heard from a friend that Alberta was an amazing place in which to settle. My father was persuaded by his optimism and moved our family to a place where he could fulfill his dreams for a better life for all of us. At the time I was two years old, so my recollection is a little fuzzy. My father partnered in his first practice in Calgary at the Macleod Trail Animal Hospital, and a few years later he moved to open three practices in the Edmonton area, two in Edmonton and one later in Ardrossan.

Alberta is a land of opportunity, where skilled people can achieve their dreams in a strong business climate. My father's story is a true example of this. Growing up, my father taught me that with hard work and planning anything is possible. This inspired me to set my own personal goals and take advantage of the opportunities Alberta has to offer.

As we're all aware, the economic climate in Alberta varies, and this is why our government has applied a prudent and long-term approach to spending and saving. As stated in the throne speech, more than \$35 billion has been saved, over \$7 billion of which is part of the sustainability fund to protect Albertans from temporary drops in energy revenues. In addition to prudent saving, our government also remains committed to our core programs and services, such as health, education, infrastructure, and environment. These programs are important to all Albertans, and our government will not abandon them because of a short-term drop in revenues.

Alberta is well positioned because of its commitment to planning and saving, and we are prepared to face the future with confidence and optimism. It's important in a time when the world is facing

economic uncertainty that our decisions not be made out of fear but instead through a commitment to a well-thought-out vision for the future. Our government will rise above this current challenge and will continue to position Alberta as an economically stable and prosperous province. As His Honour highlighted, this stability will come by continuing to create an environment which allows business to thrive.

As part of this stability, however, rests our commitment to the environment. To this end we are prepared to invest \$2 billion for three to five carbon capture and storage projects. This investment will reduce 5 million tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions, the equivalent of taking a third of Alberta's vehicles off the road.

Alberta will be on the cutting edge of technology, making us the envy of other jurisdictions and further securing our position as an innovation leader. I strongly believe carbon capture and storage is more efficient than a cap and trade system, which entails a transfer of wealth to a certain degree, and I'm unconvinced this will solve the problem of reducing emissions. Our government is prepared to move forward to invest in and develop new technologies. This willingness will make Alberta more competitive and allow us to compete and excel on the international stage. Furthermore, these advances will no doubt lead to a better quality of life for Albertans in generations to come.

Our government has also committed to moving forward with an aggressive investment into our current and future infrastructure projects. Infrastructure has always been part of our long-term strategy in planning for our future. I'm proud one of these new infrastructure projects includes a new hospital in Sherwood Park that will serve my riding of Strathcona. Mr. Speaker, the Strathcona community hospital will open with plans for 72 acute-care beds and has been designed to allow for the eventual addition of 36 more. In addition, 80 per cent of these beds will be in private patient rooms, which will help not only reduce the risk of infection but will ensure patient privacy. Furthermore, this facility will link to a health services centre which provides services such as community rehabilitation and mental health support. This further demonstrates how our government is committed to ensuring that all Albertans have adequate health care now and in the future.

In addition, our investment strategy includes a multibillion-dollar savings account which funds infrastructure and other capital projects for both the provincial and local governments.

In the Speech from the Throne the Lieutenant Governor clearly highlighted our commitment to taking care of our most vulnerable. Seniors have long contributed to Albertans' prosperity, and we should take the time to step back and honour them for their hard work and integrity. Our government is committed to providing long-term care facilities as part of the continuing care strategy. The critical objective of this strategy centres on the goal of building and improving infrastructure. As part of this the government has pledged to refurbish over 7,000 long-term care beds by 2015 and support the development of 1,225 supportive living spaces. This government's dedication to our seniors further highlights the important role they play in shaping and guiding this great province.

It's our responsibility as members of this House to build upon the legacy they have left to us, and perhaps this responsibility is best exemplified through our commitment to the environment. It is imperative that our government works to ensure Albertans have access to an abundant and safe water supply. Our water for life strategy is North America's most comprehensive water management plan, and it focuses on improving our water efficiency, productivity, and management practices.

Albertans can continue to be proud of the many qualities that draw people to our province. We understand that Albertans are facing

uncertain economic times and will look to our government for leadership and assistance. Rest assured that Alberta is well positioned to face the challenges of today due to prudent financial planning. My father instilled this in me with the values of hard work, planning, innovation, and optimism, values that helped me become president of my own General Motors dealership at 31. I'm proud to say that I see these same qualities in our government.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: There are five minutes for comments or questions.

Mr. Chase: I did not have the opportunity to watch the full Obama interview last night on CBC, but my understanding is that the United States government has set aside approximately 2 and a half billion dollars for their entire multimillion population for sequestration. The only example we have of sequestration is the Weyburn field in Saskatchewan, which receives CO₂ from North Dakota. Do you have through your government connections significant faith in the sequestration process that it warrants \$2 billion of government funding, which has yet to be matched by industry?

Mr. Quest: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not, obviously, intimately familiar with the technical side, but I have great faith in the technology. I have great faith in this province and the very skilled and technically capable people in this province. If it can be done on a small scale in Saskatchewan, it can absolutely be done on a large scale in Alberta.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question to my hon. colleague would be: do you really feel that the number of beds that you mentioned are going to be adequate in the future in Sherwood Park to cover that large area? Out of those number of beds – I realize that they are acute – there will be a number of seniors in those beds. Do you have adequate beds to be able to move those seniors forward? I guess my main question would be: do you really feel that those numbers that you quoted are going to be adequate for the future?

4:00

Mr. Quest: Yes. Strathcona, of course, is part of the greater capital region, so it probably fits into some larger plans. In my constituency in the eastern part of Sherwood Park there are a number of private and semiprivate and subsidized facilities that are also under construction right now. The population in my own constituency is a bit younger than the average in Alberta, so, yes, I believe that certainly in my own constituency there will be adequate long-term care.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. members?

Seeing none, I would now recognize the hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to take a little bit different tack in responding to the Speech from the Throne. I'd like to pay tribute to the gentleman who gave the speech because in many ways the hon. Lieutenant Governor is so symbolic of many things in Alberta. What an honour for all of us to be in the Chamber and hear the speech from that man. The last statement in the speech said: "It is Alberta's people that make our province unique: people

who are dynamic and genuine, optimistic and open-minded." I doubt that there's anyone in this province who doesn't believe that the Hon. Norman Kwong suits that to a T.

He was born in Calgary in 1929, one of six children, to parents who emigrated from Taishan, China, to open and operate a grocery store. He's been married to his lovely wife, Mary, for 48 years. They have four sons and five grandchildren.

What I can safely say in the confines of this House is that if he has made any mistakes in his life, it was probably back in 1948 when he joined the Calgary Stampeders. Mr. Speaker, Alberta as a young province made some mistakes, too, so I can clearly see that it's possible. In doing so, he became the first Chinese Canadian to play in the Canadian Football League and later the youngest to win the Grey Cup. In total he won four cups with Calgary and Edmonton after he was traded here in 1951. [interjection] You know, it's not a real surprise that a lot of good things happened in this province in the '50s.

An Hon. Member: When were you born?

Mr. Snelgrove: I'm just not trying to fool you.

You know, known across Canada as the China Clipper, he rushed for over 9,000 yards, averaged 5.2 yards per carry. It does make you wonder why they needed anybody else on the football team; just give it to him twice and have a first down. But they did use other players, which could explain why he didn't win all the Grey Cups he played in because some of those other players weren't that good. He won the cup in '54, '55, and '56 with the Eskimos. He was a western all-star running back, winner of the all-Canadian fullback award five times, named the CFL's most outstanding Canadian in 1955-56, and was Canada's male athlete of the year in 1955. At the time of his retirement he held over 30 CFL records and was the all-time CFL touchdown leader.

Like many others in Alberta he had to do other jobs while he competed in the sport he loved, and he did. He sold real estate and got involved with other ventures. He sold cars and did what he had to do, as many Albertans have over the years to provide for their families. The CFL didn't pay a whole lot back then. He said that in his first year of football he earned \$6,000, but by the end of it he was pulling in a whopping \$15,000 a year. I think that most people that achieve the greatness he has do it for the love of the game, and that's probably much like why we're in Alberta. We love it here and for many good reasons.

After he retired from the CFL His Honour spent the next few decades in the private sector in sales, commercial real estate, and eventually became the vice-president and general manager of Torode Realty.

You know, it seems like the good people, the really hard-working people, get asked to do a lot of things, and I think his love of the province and his love of sport encouraged him to become the general manager back at the Calgary Stampeders from 1988 to 1991. He also was a co-owner of the Calgary Flames hockey club, actually, back when they used to win games, from 1980 to 1984. As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure that Calgary still has a professional hockey team, but certainly not because Mr. Kwong didn't try to bring one there. Anyway, on to something more pleasant.

His Honour is a former national chairman of the Consultative Council on Multiculturalism, former honorary chairman of the Easter Seals campaign in Calgary, a member of the Order of Canada and Alberta Order of Excellence as well as a knight of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem. He holds an honorary doctorate of law from the University of Alberta and was appointed Lieutenant Governor on January 20, 2005.

Now, the gentleman, as we all know, has a very quiet demeanour, but he has a wonderful sense of humour. Sometimes you have to listen carefully to hear it. I recall one particular fundraiser in Edmonton. He has an ongoing battle with Danny Hooper, and Hooper kids him. I remember him walking by in front of the podium, stopping and saying quietly enough that we weren't supposed to hear but into the microphone so we all could hear: Hooper, Zwozdesky is a better auctioneer than you.

Like our province, some things are a contradiction, like our Lieutenant Governor. He may be small in stature; he's certainly larger than life. When you look at our province maybe with a sense of humour, just south of here a couple of hours we have the Drumheller badlands, world renowned, a place where we go look at old, big, dead things. In Alberta we also have the most powerful nanotechnology microscope in the world where we can look at really small new things. One is the connection to our past, and obviously one is the future. In my riding I can go down to Paradise Valley, and I can go into their elevator museum. They call it travelling back through time. Like many elevators that have been restored around Alberta, it has a great history of the families and the activities of that community, and now that's what it does. Or I can go over to the elevator in Vermilion and climb on top of it now, and I can see the future of agriculture where Lakeland College is working at growing crops that are more specialized for the biodiesel, biofuels, supporting the ethanol plant in Lloydminster, and teaching the young people that go there a whole new way of agriculture.

It's a province that contradicts itself in many ways. We have a city, Medicine Hat, that's called the city with hell for a basement. We have natural gas in this province thousands of metres down where we go looking for it, and at the other end, as the hon. member mentioned, we've got oil running right out of the riverbanks, as it has for generations, into the Athabasca River. You'd have to think: well, you know, it maybe was a government committee that planned this province, but they didn't get it all perfect.

To go into our history right in Edmonton, we can stand in Fort Edmonton Park and feel the history of this area, where the settlers started and crossed the river, and we can see the University of Alberta, where our future is, the medical research that's ongoing, the understanding that innovation, technology, and knowledge are going to take us from the riverboats that landed here to wherever the future goes.

We've got so much to be so thankful for. I live in a wonderful part of the province. We used to occasionally have to go down to Kananaskis for conferences and conventions. Well, in that drive I go across land so flat that, like the Member for Drumheller-Stettler would say, you could see your dog run away for two days, then through the badlands and then through Calgary, the gorgeous city of Calgary – it needs a good hockey team but, nevertheless, a gorgeous city – and then into the mountains. No matter how many times you drive that highway towards Banff and Lake Louise, you have to admire the beauty of it.

If you get the opportunity, walk in downtown Banff and realize what an international province we've become when the signs are in German and Japanese and French and English, and the people look more like a movie set. That's right here, and it's very much the same in Jasper.

Or you can drive north. I had the great pleasure to be up to the Peace Country. I'd never been there as a young person. I don't know what the heck I've got about climbing up on elevators, but I'll tell you, climb up on the elevator at Falher and you can see for miles. That country, the Peace Country, is the hidden gem of Alberta. It is as flat and productive as can be. There is more arable land in the Peace Country than there is in the entire province of

Manitoba. So, you know, we've got all of these opportunities. Mr. Speaker, in this job I've had tremendous opportunity to travel to virtually every corner of Alberta and see these things. In the summers we've travelled to some with our family.

4:10

The things that I'll remember the most: I think, one, the day the Queen came to our Chamber and spoke. That was one of the most inspiring things. I mean, I sat over in that chair and thought: what the heck is the big deal? I wasn't a real monarchist. And then you see her in this Chamber, and you understand what majesty means. To be here for the pomp and ceremony of a throne speech that our Lieutenant Governor delivered, that's special. So to him I say: "Right on. Good health." Good luck, Alberta. With people like him we're on the right track.

The Deputy Speaker: Five minutes for questions and comments. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Before I make my comments, I'd like to very much thank my hon. colleague. That really was a rah-rah speech, but it was very moving, and I thank you for that. I was listening. I may have missed this, but I think you missed it: Normie Kwong also is the only one to have both a Grey Cup ring and a Stanley Cup ring, the Grey Cup as a player and the Stanley Cup ring as an owner. I'm not sure if it's in Canada, but he certainly is the only one to have that in Alberta. I was at a do with him, and he let me try both of them on. His wife kept her eye on me the entire time to make sure that he got them back.

So thank you very much.

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is absolutely correct. I appreciate the comments. I would have had to admit, though, that he won the Stanley Cup with Calgary, and you know, there are just some things . . .

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I, too, would like to commend the hon. President of the Treasury Board for his tribute to Normie Kwong. When we lost Lois Hole, there were large shoes to fill, and a search was undertaken. Normie Kwong has done an extremely admirable job I wouldn't say in filling but sort of standing beside in similarly large shoes.

I was also very impressed by the travelogue, the beauty of Alberta, and also the history that Alberta has experienced, to a degree, through Normie Kwong's eyes. When Normie Kwong's parents first arrived, there was a terrific amount of prejudice in this province, and over the years the racial prejudice has diminished tremendously due to the warmth in which Albertans have supported each other. However, pockets of prejudice still exist, particularly for individuals of a lesbian, homosexual, or a transgendered nature, and until we get past those prejudices, we still have some history to cover.

As a grandfather I'll ask the question: do you think the glories of the future will live up to or potentially surpass our glories of the past? Are we handing over to our next generation an Alberta that they can be proud of and that will sustain them?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, absolutely. What we're passing on is changing. The world lived in an agriculture commodity environment for 5,000 years, and then they got into an industrial age, that kind of ran the economy of the world for 150. Then the information age has taken probably a 70-year span, and it's not over yet,

although I wish it was when I hear some of the sounds in here, but it's not over yet. What's the next great thing? It's going to be genetics, and it's going to be nanotechnology, and this province is leading in both of those.

The most important of a lot of the solutions that we're going to give our children is, I would think, health. It's okay to take care of people, but it's best if they don't need the hospital, if we can keep them well and understanding what makes us sick: the curse of cancer, of MS. That's what I think we are going to pass on. There will be issues, and there will be problems. There are in any country and any province at any time. You have more people moving in, and there's change.

I've talked some about the great big jigsaw puzzle we're all building here in Alberta. Just when we get it pretty close, they dump another 60,000 pieces on. If you put your puzzle together so loosely that you can fit the pieces in, nothing is holding it together, yet if you put them together tightly, how do you fit them in? It's that balance. Do we have the opportunity to pass on so much more to our children, their children, and the rest of this world? I can tell you that I think yes.

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

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak in debate to the throne speech, assuming that the five-minute question period is over? Thank you so much.

Mr. Speaker, this particular throne speech is of great value and of great importance to all Albertans. Just as I look at the headlines, the main categories of Creating Opportunity and Showing Environmental Leadership and People Thriving in a Skilled Workforce and A Healthy Approach and Strong Communities and a sterling Conclusion, I thank God that I'm in this province, where I can live the lifestyle that I wish to live and my family can as well, because it truly provides us with boundless opportunities.

Taking a look at this throne speech from another perspective, I look at what it means to other people as well. I look at some of the people who are impacted, for example, through the ministry that I'm privileged to serve, the Ministry of Aboriginal Relations, and at some of the outstanding initiatives that we'll be pursuing here. I'm going to comment a little bit at length about two because time wouldn't permit me to comment about all of them.

On page 3, Mr. Speaker, as you would know, we referenced the aboriginal consultation policy and guidelines, which are going to be reviewed this year. This policy and these guidelines have been in place now for five or more years, and it has just come time to refresh those particular policies and guidelines with a view to creating greater certainty for First Nations people, for Métis people, for industry, for provincial government purposes, for municipalities, for the federal government as well. We're going to do that.

Everybody wants some certainty and some clarity with respect to consultation. I'll tell you why, Mr. Speaker: primarily because the lands that traditionally First Nations and Métis people have occupied are precious to this province and precious to them. They are precious because land, air, and water are three of the basic things that we must strive hard to protect, and we must have very clear guidelines surrounding their use.

One of the significant growth areas, of course, is our oil sands. I have to tell you that I was extremely pleased to accompany the hon. President of the Treasury Board last Thursday when we went up to Fort McMurray with the MLA from that area, and we unveiled that particular strategy, the new plan, as it were, called Responsible Actions: A Plan for Alberta's Oil Sands.

Mr. Speaker, there are six objectives in this particular document, and one of them as a strategy is dedicated to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people, where we are going to promote clarity and consistency in our consultation process, where we're going to enhance collaborative government-to-government relationships, where we are going to continue to work with Métis settlements in the oil sands region, and where we're going to involve a series of related government strategies on First Nations protocol agreements and strengthening our relationships through the aboriginal policy framework and the land-use framework and a number of other things. It is just loaded with opportunities which we're trying and working very hard with First Nations and Métis communities to do whatever they can to capitalize on.

4:20

Another area that we're interested in pursuing – and I hope we can get to some clarity as we do this consultation piece – is on differentiating between consultation, compensation, and accommodation. Anyone here who has ever been involved in any of those negotiations knows full well how intricately woven those three concepts are. Consultation about treaty rights, for example, compensation for potential adverse effects on the land, or compensation in a partnering way: none of this is negative. This has all to do with empowering greater strides toward self-reliance and autonomy for all aboriginal communities.

We can talk about economic opportunities from the labour side. We can talk about economic opportunities from the skills training side and the mentoring side. I just want to highlight a couple of them for you because our ministry has been involved in these in one way or another. The single-largest bitumen upgrader facility on First Nation land anywhere in Canada is going to be right here in Alberta. In fact, it's already running. I was up in that neck of the woods last summer with the hon. Member for . . .

Ms Calahasen: Lesser Slave Lake.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Lesser Slave Lake – thank you – when we cut the ribbon, as it were, on a joint venture project with Bronco Energy out of Calgary partnering with the Bigstone Cree First Nation just around the Wabasca area. Mr. Speaker, that one project alone, which came about as a result of very careful consultation and strategizing and partnering, is already looking at 6,000 barrels of flow per day, and it can go up to several thousand more. We'll see how that develops in the future, but it's a huge project that they can well capitalize on as they move forward with their strides for self-sustainability.

Another one is a project on the Alexander reserve straight west of Morinville. I believe it's in the lovely constituency of Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert. The hon. member knows it because he's been there as well. This is the single-largest database collection, retrieval, and storage system anywhere in western Canada, and I wouldn't be surprised if it's even larger than that. This is a joint project between eNation out of Calgary and the Alexander First Nation.

Now, I mention these just as two very high-profile success stories that the world needs to know about, not just Albertans. Frequently our aboriginal communities get a rough rub, and I think we're all familiar with that. Sometimes our friends in the media tend to focus a little too much on the negative stories, but here are a few that are very positive. The Fort McKay First Nation, north of Fort McMurray, has an incredible project called the Creeburn Lake Lodge, and that, too, has come about as a result of some of the capacity building that we as a ministry, that we as a government have been doing over the past few years.

It's time to review those policies and those guidelines, and that's what this throne speech has indicated we will do. I'll just quote for you from page 3, where it says: "with input from First Nations and industry to ensure the approach to consultation is beneficial to all Albertans." We're very committed to that. One of the commitments that we have in that respect, Mr. Speaker, has to do with the recently signed protocol agreement on government-to-government relations between the government of Alberta and First Nations in our province.

As you would know, there are 47 First Nations in this province. We value and respect each and every one of them. On their behalf the three grand chiefs – the grand chief of Treaty 6, the grand chief of Treaty 7, and the grand chief of Treaty 8 – along with their vice grand chiefs signed an official protocol agreement on May 22, 2008, with our Premier and myself. That protocol agreement among other things sets up a true new relationship on a government-to-government basis that will allow at least two formal meetings with eight or nine consultation ministers and the grand chiefs and their vice grand chiefs, and it guarantees one formal meeting as well with the Premier and the same grand chiefs and vice grand chiefs. That's very significant, Mr. Speaker, because no other agreement exists in this country today on a government-to-government relationship basis such as our protocol agreement. There will be other meetings, of course. All the ministers are having other meetings, and so are MLA colleagues having meetings of their own. But that is a formal process that has arisen out of the true meaningful consultation aspect that we're pursuing here and reviewing.

I'm also pleased to tell you that as part of this aboriginal policy framework and the policy and guidelines document that guides us, we have been able to conclude a longer term operating agreement with the Métis Nation of Alberta Association. That's a seven-year agreement, Mr. Speaker, worth about \$1.5 million per year. At the same time, we've also recently concluded a three-year interim funding agreement with the Métis Settlements General Council and their eight councils. That will be about an \$18 million project over three years as we work toward completing long-term governance and long-term funding arrangements for their benefit. Those are a few of the things that we'll be talking about.

The other point that I want to mention very quickly, Mr. Speaker, is on page 8 under the headline Adapting to a Changing Business Environment as outlined in the Speech from the Throne by His Honour. The second paragraph from the end on that page says:

This summer, the Government of Alberta, in partnership with Treaty Seven First Nations, will present a first-of-its kind international symposium that will bring together Aboriginal and business communities to share and encourage indigenous economic development strategies.

This will be not only the first of its kind here but the first of its kind anywhere with a specific focus on indigenous or aboriginal economic development success strategies. We will host well over 500 people at the end of June in this province in Banff, just in the Treaty 7 area, in partnership with Treaty 7, I should stress, one of the largest and most impactful conferences that we've ever had with and for aboriginal people.

We will have world leaders here, keynote speakers who will be talking about economic success stories that are adaptable by or should be considered by anyone, everyone, but specifically by aboriginal communities. In that respect we have a program in our ministry called FNEPI, First Nations economic partnerships initiative, and that's where this idea sprang to my head to pursue something on an international level that would bring world experts here to help facilitate even greater economic growth and economic partnering between First Nations, Métis settlements, MNA folks, or

whomever in the aboriginal community, with so many other possible partners not only in Alberta but across Canada and throughout the world.

The symposium is called Gathering for Success. I'll just note for everyone's attention that it takes place in Banff on June 28, 29, 30 of 2009, and if they're interested, they can punch it up on the website at gatheringforsuccess.ca. That's a very important part of this throne speech. I'm so pleased that it was able to be highlighted and commented on in this particular throne speech this year.

Mr. Speaker, I could go on about the aboriginal components, but my point in raising these is to simply say how inclusive our government of Alberta is on aboriginal issues and on aboriginal consultation, meaningful consultation, I should stress, and on other matters affecting aboriginal communities. I say that because I not only believe it and feel it in my heart, but I know that it's the true way to go in order to help us succeed more in our dealings with and in the empowerment of aboriginal communities and aboriginal individuals and aboriginal organizations in this province.

Mr. Speaker, just before I leave that point and wrap up my comments, I think everyone here should be reminded that the aboriginal community across Canada but specifically here in Alberta is growing on a percentage basis at a rate of 2 to 2.5 times faster than the combined population of Alberta. In other words, if the population of Alberta is growing at a rate of 3.5 per cent, whatever it is – I've just forgotten the exact number – the aboriginal percentage is two times higher than that. That's a tremendous opportunity.

4:30

It's also a challenge to handle, if you will, but it's a tremendous opportunity to take advantage of a growing population that will soon become a potential labour source, even greater than it already is, and one that we would do well to pay great attention to. The other point is to realize that almost 60 per cent of our aboriginal population today is already under 30 years of age, so it shows you what the growth potential there is and can be.

I would be remiss, Mr. Speaker, if I didn't mention a few comments about health care, and I'm delighted that we have a section in here called A Healthy Approach. I know and I think everybody here knows that health care still tends to be the number one issue on Albertans' minds – it certainly is in my constituency, particularly from the aspect of seniors – so we have some work to do there, that's for sure. There's an entire page dedicated to some of the broader initiatives that we'll be pursuing.

Similarly, there are issues that affect another part of my portfolio, which is the Strong Communities section on page 10, where we talk about cultures of creativity such as the Arts Day. I have a large component of constituents who are artists themselves or are arts supporters, and I'm delighted to see them in there along with the antigang summit.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My time has run out.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes for comments and questions. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I very much appreciate the minister pointing out not only the potential for First Nations to take their rightful place in Alberta but the challenges surrounding them having that full right of citizenship. I'm just wondering if you can comment upon educational opportunities, providing opportunities for First Nations people, and where they stand in terms of our dependence, it seems, on temporary foreign workers. How can we better provide a sustainable future for our First Nations, who basically were the founders of this province?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much. You know, you've hit the heart of the matter in terms of what my first priority is in this portfolio. I indicated very early on – well, I've met now with over 300 or 400 aboriginal communities just in this last not even year. I said that the number one priority is education, that number two will be economic development because it leads one into the other, and number three is resource management and all of the stuff that goes with the treaty rights and the aboriginal rights, be they asserted rights or constitutional rights or whatever.

But to come back to your question, it might warm your heart, hon. member, to know that for the first time ever we are having an aboriginal education summit comprised of ministers of education, comprised of ministers of aboriginal relations or whatever their local title might be, and the federal minister of INAC, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. It'll be next week in Saskatoon. I'll be joining the Minister of Education from Alberta, for example. We've already caucused with the grand chiefs of treaties 6, 7, and 8 and with the MNA president and with the Métis Settlements General Council president to strategize what issues we want put on the table.

I'll share with you what some of those issues are. I was just down south at the Blood reserve this morning, and I gave this speech there, so I'm somewhat fresh on it, and it talks about what is commonly referred to as a statistical funding gap. That's specific to the amount of money that the federal government pays for on-reserve education on a per-student basis versus what we as a province present as off-reserve, if you like, education; in other words, for the general population. It is conventionally known – and, again, I'm not criticizing here; I'm just pointing out a statistic – that there's a statistical gap of somewhere around 2,000, sometimes a little bit higher, between those two systems and those two forums. So we're going to be talking about that.

Another issue we're going to be talking about is the transition rate that we have from high school into postsecondary, which ties in with the skills training, and the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology has commented on some strategies that he has in that respect. Our job as provincial ministers is to bring this matter to the attention of the federal government and to see where there might be an opportunity for us to not take over federal responsibility but to augment where we see an opportunity to do so. I know that the Minister of Education is focused on that, as I was when I was Minister of Education. We live with the consequences of not handling it properly if we don't handle it properly, and we want to avoid that. In brief, those are a few of the issues that are there.

I should mention one other issue that they've asked be mentioned, and that is that at the reserve end, the Indian reserve end or First Nations end, they are questioning how the growth figures on the one hand don't yield a lifting of the 2 per cent increase per annum on the other end. To put it differently, the federal government is generously giving a 2 per cent per annum increase for on-reserve education, but that 2 per cent, First Nations would tell you and I would agree, is not keeping pace with their needs and their growth and the evergreening they need and the equipment they need and so on. So I've advanced the concept of a triple E approach, equal education for everyone, and we'll see where that goes next week.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. The First Nations have demonstrated a large degree of integrity in saying that they will not allow their standardized achievement test results to be broadcast because it's their personal business, because it's the personal business of the family. How do you feel about that as a provincial-wide trend?

Mr. Zwozdesky: One of the things that we have talked about with the First Nations chiefs is the need for honesty and openness and for accessing those kinds of things. We have to know where we're at in order to move forward, so I hope they'll start releasing those.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, our five minutes are up.

I will now recognize the hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week His Honour the Lieutenant Governor rose in this House and delivered Alberta's Speech from the Throne. As he did that, I pondered the fact that the first time that I heard the Lieutenant Governor deliver a Speech from the Throne, I had been an elected MLA for less than a month and had sat in this House for a very short time. I was so pleased to see His Honour the Lieutenant Governor again offering not only views with respect to the future of this province and what the government agenda was but also his own personal perspective and his own personal insight into how he cares about this province. I thought that over the past year as I have been able to spend time with him, very small amounts of time, his charm and his love of this province have always been reflected in everything that he has done. I feel very honoured to have been able to be an MLA at the time that he has served this province as Lieutenant Governor.

I also thought a great deal about what life has been like for me and probably for many of my new colleagues this year and about the changes that we have gone through as we have become more knowledgeable and more involved in the work of this government and this House with respect to the future of this province. I am very grateful to be here, I feel very honoured to be here, and I wanted to take a moment to thank my constituents and my colleagues and my family for allowing me to serve this province.

His Honour spoke of facing the future with confidence and of the value of safe and strong communities. Challenges lay ahead. In the last year we have faced many challenges as a government and as a province, and I guess the challenge of government is that we don't know what those will be. They have been unexpected, and I think the test that we must face as a government is how we respond to events that arise without knowing what those will be. I believe from my experience as an Albertan and as my experience in this government has shown me that Alberta will rise to these challenges and that we will build an even stronger future for our children.

Here, Mr. Speaker, I must say that I am very grateful for the direction that our Premier has shown and his passion toward future generations and ensuring that what this province will look like and what our children will inherit will be worth inheriting and will be similar if not better than what we as young Albertans inherited.

4:40

A strong and healthy future can only be achieved when Albertans feel safe and secure within their homes and in their communities. Albertans must have confidence in their government, and it has been very clear to me in the past year that from my perspective and from the perspective of many Albertans that translates into confidence in their justice system. As Minister of Justice and Attorney General it is my responsibility to ensure that government is doing enough to prevent crime, to intervene and provide support for those in need, and to enforce the laws that we all live under.

Alberta's safe communities initiative is now into its second year. That initiative, as I referred earlier to the work that we have to do, is a shared responsibility amongst my colleagues and amongst this government. Our first year focused on building a foundation. We added more police officers. We enhanced the role of the Crown

prosecutor and bail hearings. We hired more prosecutors, both special prosecutors and general Crown prosecutors. We developed legislation to combat crime. We added more treatment beds for Albertans struggling with addiction.

Through the recommendations of the safe communities task force we've identified the areas where we need to be better, stronger, and more focused. We know that the roots of crime can very often be traced back to families in need that sometimes will become families in crisis. Substance abuse, family violence, mental illness, and lack of community support are all common underlying factors for criminal activity.

Mr. Speaker, those are the areas where we need to focus as we move forward. Those are the areas where we can make a real difference before crimes are committed and before anyone becomes a victim of crime. This is important not only because it addresses the root causes of crime, but I believe that when we travel this province as members of this Legislature and we talk to people that live in communities, their pride in their community is reflected and is tested and judged by how communities take care of people in need. I believe that that is an underlying philosophy of this government, and I believe it's a very important reason that the Premier has been able to lead so effectively on the safe communities plan.

Our world may be changing, but our values are not. Albertans today share the same values that we did in years past. We want to raise our families in safe and caring communities, and we look out for our neighbours and for those in our communities who need help. But we also want to protect our homes and protect our property. We respect the law, and we expect others to respect the law, and we expect accountability and compassion from our justice system.

We expect the actions of our government to reflect those values, and that's a very complicated set of values. The safe communities initiative has nine government ministries that work together to find realistic, tangible crime reduction strategies. The police, the courts, community leaders, and municipalities all have key roles to play. We can't eliminate crime and social disorder overnight, but if we chip away at this issue with meaningful approaches and meaningful partnerships, I think we'll be surprised at what we can achieve.

Even in this past year through the approach that we've been able to take through the safe communities initiative, through integrated partnerships that involve helping people in need, we've been able to support people who perhaps have come into contact with the justice system, unfortunately, and need more help than simply being incarcerated. We can speak to programs that have been a success even this year: Pathways in Calgary, Rapid Exit in Edmonton.

Mr. Speaker, we need to take a look at that full paradigm of what safe communities means. We need to look at education, prevention, diversion, and then enforcement and prosecution. It's very important that while we speak about the enforcement and the prosecution piece, we also understand that if we don't deal with the first issues, we will only ever be dealing with those last issues.

Mr. Speaker, I mentioned that our world is changing. Alberta is changing, and I think Albertans know that. What was once considered big-city crime is taking root in smaller communities. As I visited a number of small communities to talk about the safe communities initiatives, I have been struck at how open people are about their concerns as to what's happening in their communities.

The other side of that is that big-city crime in Alberta is truly big-city crime these days. The issues that we're facing in Calgary and Edmonton and the five other urban centres are particularly acute at this moment. I think it's very important as we move forward that we acknowledge the leadership that police services, police agencies across this province have taken in enforcement and take a moment to thank them for the work that they do and the high-risk work that they are doing.

There's a real concern out there about crime and the effect that it's having on our society, and much of the work within Alberta Justice now is focusing on organized crime. Mr. Speaker, gangs are not going away. Organized crime is one of the world's oldest industries. It's an industry based on selling drugs, victimizing vulnerable people, and making money. Unfortunately, as we see not only in Alberta but across the country, business is booming. In a strong economy or a struggling economy, unfortunately, there is a market for illegal narcotics. It's a sad reality. In good times and bad it's a competitive market. Today's gangs are sophisticated, well organized, and mobile. They don't respect our provincial boundaries.

In order to disrupt and dismantle gang activity, we have to act now, and we have to act smart. We're working within our provincial legislation and introducing new laws to address gang-related crime. Bill 50, the Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Act, gets to the heart of what Safe Communities is trying to do. The new legislation hits gangs where it hurts the most: their cash flow, their profitability. The act allows us to seize, hold, and sell property connected to unlawful activity and to return the proceeds to the communities and the victims that are affected by these crimes.

In the two months that the civil forfeiture office has been operational, we're seeing great promise in this initiative. Police agencies have been extremely receptive and are submitting files for review under this act on a daily basis. This is a true partnership between the police and the Crown. Alberta currently has seizure orders on vehicles, guns, drugs, cash, and homes, including a property used to house a large-scale grow operation in a rural community. The total value of illegal profit connected to the seized property in the last seven weeks is 4 and a half million dollars. As I mentioned, this legislation hits organized crime hard, and it removes some of the profit from the gang activity. Mr. Speaker, we believe that when you're dealing with people that are prepared to commit heinous criminal acts, we must hit them where it hurts the most, and we believe that that's affecting their ability to do business in this province.

Mr. Speaker, as a Calgary MLA I hear the concerns about violent crime. I share those concerns. We've seen a number of examples in Calgary in the last two months of armoured vehicles being observed. The police know where these armoured vehicles are. This is the reality of organized crime, and eliminating rivals is a part of doing business. Firing guns in public places is a part of doing business, and innocent people are getting caught in the crossfire. Gangs are not concerned with collateral damage. All they care about is hitting their target. As I mentioned, gangs are getting more sophisticated. The risk of being shot is just the cost of doing business if you're in a gang.

Police are finding an increasing number of vehicles on our streets equipped for battle. Today's gang members are driving around in virtual tanks. Bulletproof glass, hidden compartments for guns and drugs, and body armour are all ways that vehicles are being modified. These, Mr. Speaker, as long as they're allowed to be on the streets, allow gangs to operate or feel that they can operate with protection and impunity. Bill 50 ensures that we can take those vehicles off the street. The best way to make sure that someone's not driving is to get rid of their vehicle.

Mr. Speaker, the Speech from the Throne referred to a gang summit. We're very excited about this. The Premier has asked government to come together with community partners and police agencies to find ways to ensure that gangs are not impacting the justice system adversely. Gang activity puts a tremendous amount of pressure on the police and the courts, it puts innocent lives in danger, and it ensures a constant supply of drugs within our province. This is a problem that needs to be addressed, and the summit, which will be held in Calgary in June, will address that.

We need everyone on board. Mr. Speaker, this summit will be an opportunity for us to explore with our partners the development of a provincial gang strategy, a strategy that will deal with all the pieces of this issue around safe communities. We will deal with prevention, we will deal with education, we will deal with enforcement, and we will deal with prosecution. We know that this is a problem that is part of a wider organizational issue around western Canada specifically, so we will also be organizing a meeting of Attorneys General for western Canada to ensure that we are working together on this program so that gangs are not able to cross borders and operate outside of jurisdictions.

4:50

We also, Mr. Speaker, will be introducing some work with respect to witness protection. We believe that there are people out there that are afraid and intimidated. They are not people that necessarily need to be hidden from outside of their community, but they need to be given the confidence and the support to come forward and to feel that they will be protected during prosecutions.

We are also doing a lot of work with respect to federal legislation, Mr. Speaker. We believe there need to be fundamental changes to the Criminal Code. We need strong laws around drive-by shootings, any murder committed in connection to gang activity should automatically be considered first degree, and we want to see gang-free zones enforced to help stem the tide of recruitment into these organizations.

We also believe that it's very important, Mr. Speaker, for us to aggressively amend the Criminal Code to deal with bail, to change the test for bail so that judges have the test that they can move forward with in order to keep people that should be in jail in jail. We also think that it's important to impose the reverse onus. We need to ensure that if people have committed a breach of a court order, the next time that they go to court, the onus is on them to prove why they should be allowed out on bail as opposed to the court making an assumption that they should be allowed out on bail.

Mr. Speaker, we need to deal with all of these issues, the root causes of crime, provincial and federal legislation. We also need to deal with the pieces of our society that need support to ensure that they're protected from people that are involved in criminal activity. Government has an important role to play in ensuring that safety. Preventing and reducing crime is no easy task.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to ask just a short question to the hon. minister. You talked about the confidence in the justice system, and you indicated that because of some of the backlogs, et cetera, you have added Crown prosecutors and judges, but there seem to be continuing delays in the whole justice system, both in the civil and criminal divisions. I was wondering if your department is taking any steps to do an evaluation of the whole system to see if you can determine if there can be improvements in removing some of the bureaucratic delays that seem to be inherent in the judicial system.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to respond to that. We believe that within the provincial court system, which deals with most of the primary charges dealing with bail and criminal offences, while we have augmented the number of prosecutors and the number of provincial court judges, one of the

other pieces we need to look at is the way that we actually organize the work the courts do. We need to organize what we call and you will know, my friend, as the administration of justice. We need to look at how courtrooms are booked, how those systems work, whether or not lawyers are coming to court prepared. If they're not coming to court prepared, there must be a consequence.

We continually find that if you look at federal legislation, if you look at some of the disclosure requirements under the Criminal Code, there are a number of pieces of legislation and common law that create duplication. Now, under the jurisprudential piece of this it is possible for defence counsel to require disclosure at a number of different stages in the process. Our point as a justice department is that we believe that the administration of justice must be fair. We believe that everyone must be able to receive a fair trial. But we also believe that if you're going to talk about making the system effective and ensuring that people receive a fair trial in due time and that there aren't unnecessary delays, everyone, every stakeholder in the system, whether it's the Crown or defense counsel or judges, has a responsibility to ensure that the administration of justice proceeds in due course and allows for a fair trial so that everyone is served by the system.

I think that that is a new way of looking at the administration of justice. It's not something that's only happening in Alberta. It's part of what we're seeing around civil procedure reform across the country. Because we need the public to know that this justice system also serves them, we need to ensure that everyone feels that the system is working toward a resolution. When I say that, I don't mean a resolution that will always end up in a guilty plea but a satisfactory resolution that respects the rights of the accused but also understands that people need to have confidence in the system. If they no longer have confidence in the system, then we have failed. So it's very important, as we have these discussions and we involve stakeholders, that everyone understands that they have a role to play. It's about access to justice, and it's about access to justice for everyone because the justice system has to serve our entire community.

Mr. Hehr: I appreciate the hon. minister's comments on, you know, we've got to help people along and support them along the way, or else dealing with them at the endgame is where we're always going to be. But just two quick questions on that. Do you find that our policing numbers, even though they seem to be less than other major centres, are adequate going forward? The second thing: what is the status of the Calgary drug court and the province's role in the future of that?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you. The first thing I'll say is that I have found the discussions and the partnership that I have developed as Minister of Justice with the chiefs of police, particularly in Calgary and Edmonton, in the last year to be probably the most important part of the work that we have done around safe communities. Both Chief Rick Hanson and Mike Boyd have a very firm understanding of all pieces of this. What I find interesting is that we have been able, I think rightly, to move the discussion from being about X number of boots on the street to what those police are doing. Our discussions and our partnerships with the Calgary Police Service and the Edmonton Police Service talk about targeting police officers in those areas that are involved with kids in schools, prevention, and families at risk. I know that people sometimes synthesize this down to a simplistic approach of saying: oh, there aren't enough police on the streets. The chiefs tell us that that's not all they need. What they

need and what they're getting from us is targeted police officers to deal with the front end of these challenges.

Mrs. Klimchuk: I move that we adjourn debate, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 2

Lobbyists Amendment Act, 2009

[Adjourned debate February 17: Mr. Stevens]

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

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today to move second reading of Bill 2, the Lobbyists Amendment Act, 2009.

The Deputy Speaker: My apology. It was moved yesterday by the hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations on behalf of the Minister of Justice and Attorney General, so, Minister, you are not allowed to speak until all the others speak. Thank you.

We'll keep speaking on the bill, then, please. The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

5:00

Mr. Hehr: Thank you very much. It's my pleasure to rise and speak on Bill 2, the Lobbyists Amendment Act, 2009. You know, it's nice to see that Alberta has moved a long way from where it was some 10 years ago, when they denied the need for this type of, I guess, transparent and open government. I'll say more on that towards the end of my speech. Although we still have a long way to go, this is, I guess, an important beginning, and these amendments are adding to that piece of the puzzle which will one day, hopefully, get Alberta to the place where we really can be. What we are seeking is open and transparent government. Like I said, we're not there yet, but we seem to be plodding along that path. If we could plod along a little faster, that would be appreciated, but we're getting there.

I guess what these types of bills are really trying to balance is representative citizens being able to go forward and meet with their government officials and discuss the business of the day and discuss what ails them or what ails their communities and what governments could do to make things better on their behalf, make the environment better, make the justice system better, make our postsecondary system better.

At the same time, despite the fact that these are often made in the public interest, we have many people or many organizations who are acting in the private sphere or in their private interest that then go forward to government members and people in power and put forward an agenda that may be slightly different than a version that would be in the public interest but more fosters a private interest, the private interests of, for example, farm owners or private interests of oil companies or private interests of schoolteachers, whatever it may be.

That's where the Lobbyists Act tries to balance and cut some rights or comes to a balance of what, in fact, is the rightful, sort of appropriate amount of time private interests or private organizations should be spending with government officials and trying to keep an account of when this occurs and who's meeting with who because, really, access to power enables you to influence it. That's just how it is.

We have a long-standing tradition in democracy where we try to sort of have this open government principle. It goes back to the days of the Magna Carta, where it was not expressed but implied that people would have the right to go see their governments. We see in the English Bill of Rights in 1689 that you have the right of the subjects to petition the king. We see that also in our federal Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the freedom of association and the freedom of expression, where our ability to go see our government officials is implied there. But, again, it's really back to that balance between what is too much influence and how that influence is being wielded, and that's what our Lobbyists Act is trying to come to terms with.

Now a little bit of not really a history lesson but sort of where we are. The federal government first came in with a lobbyist registry in 1986. Then Ontario came up with their Lobbyists Registration Act in 1998, Nova Scotia in 2001, British Columbia in 2001, Newfoundland and Labrador in 2005, and Quebec in 2002. With us coming up with our first cut of this back in 2007, we're a little bit behind the curve.

We would suggest that our Lobbyists Act isn't quite as good or doesn't have as many teeth in it as some of these other legislations that are on the books. That's where we would like to go, and that's where we would like to get to. If we look at our act right now, it's primarily based on what was talked about back in 2001. Really, we haven't seen a lot of movement from there. Back at that time, of course, the Klein government was against any kind of registry, so in fact, like I mentioned earlier, we have made some progress.

Of course, the Alberta Liberals campaigned for a lobbyists act back in 2004. We actually supported it all the way along, every step of the way from back in 1996, when it was introduced in this House, I believe, in the Tupper report. Is that what it is? Maybe someone else could explain that. We were calling for it as far back as then. We've been at least calling for it for some period of time. Those are the things that we'd like to see.

While I'm talking about things we'd like to see, we think there has to be an onus on more government officials actually reporting when people are in fact meeting with them and more of, you know, an approach of the government official telling a lobbyist: "Don't call us. We'll call you when we need the information." We think that approach would go a long way to limiting lobbyists and people who are trying to curry favour with the government or have their special interest put forward that may or may not be in the public interest. It would be much better served. Just an open and transparent lobbyist registry is where we should be getting to. Like I said, these are moving along that direction.

You know, I read the hon. former Leader of the Opposition's last book. It's very good reading, actually, if any of you want to go into it. It shows sort of the access to the corridors of power that people like Rod Love and Kelley Charlebois enjoyed at some point in time in our past. You look at that and look at how people like that had unfettered access and undue influence and, really, maybe had more private interests instead of public interests at heart. That is sort of where it is. I don't know if that book would still be on the shelves or if you could get some members of this Assembly a copy, but it's really a history of what can happen when you don't have a lobbyist registry or have a stopwatch or a guard at the door, so to speak. So I'll leave you with that plug.

I'll have some more comments on this, where we'd like to improve the bill, at that stage of the game. I'd just invite you all to read that book and see why we have a Lobbyists Act and why we're going in that direction and why it needs to be strengthened even further.

Thank you very much.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Like my hon. young colleague from Calgary-Buffalo, I too and all my colleagues support the notion of a lobbyists registry. As my young colleague pointed out, we've been calling for a lobbyists registry for some time. I welcome this opportunity to engage in debate on Bill 2, the Lobbyists Amendment Act, 2009.

I also want to give a tremendous amount of credit to the all-party standing policy committee that reviewed what had been the government's flagship bill from, I believe, almost two years ago. The process, unfortunately, is far from complete, and I welcome this opportunity to discuss some of the missing parts of this bill that need to be addressed.

5:10

One major loophole, probably the largest loophole, is a notion that I put into rhyme, and that's: if the government comes courting, there's no reporting. In other words, if the government member actually does a reverse lobby and says to an individual in private industry, "Would you be interested in a contract for building this particular bridge or building this particular hospital, or are you interested in providing some P3 financing for a particular government project?" no reporting takes place. In other words, the government can initiate a deal that could be in the millions or, in the case of how the carbon sequestration project goes forth, could be potentially in the billions, yet there would be no reporting required of the initial effort on the lobbying that goes behind it.

Some of these holes were dealt with by the standing policy committee in terms of the concerns that nonprofit groups had, the concerns that community associations had, wanting to understand what the rules are so that they wouldn't have to file a lobbyist application when they were talking to their local MLA. The all-party standing policy committee addressed those concerns, and a number of amendments were made. But when it comes to the biggest concern that this bill has yet to deal with – and that's conflict of interest – Bill 2, the Lobbyists Amendment Act, doesn't meet the test.

For example, a recent appointee to the health minister's superboard, Tony Franceschini, is a wonderful man. He's a very capable entrepreneur. He has built Stantec up to the point where it's a multimillion-dollar company. His company has built wonderful infrastructure projects throughout the province. However, to have him appointed to the superboard and for him to carry out his role within that superboard, does he have to leave the room every single time a question is asked with regard to a hospital renovation, a repair on an operating room, the final building or the shelling-in, as it was described, of the Peter Lougheed hospital, the well-received – when we finally get it – south Calgary hospital? This is a man whose fortunes to a large extent have been derived from working on projects for this government. For an individual who has so closely profited by connections with this government to be now a member of the superboard which, amongst other items, will be deciding on future infrastructure projects, the conflict of interest is so glaring.

Members have spoken to our Ethics Commissioner. We've had to declare what holdings we have that could potentially influence government outcomes. I would suggest that Mr. Tony Franceschini has probably not been required to give up any of his what I would think must be thousands of shares in Stantec.

An Hon. Member: Hundreds of thousands.

Mr. Chase: Potentially hundreds of thousands. So through no fault of his own he has been placed in a position of conflict of interest by his appointment.

Now, the Ethics Commissioner, Neil Wilkinson, whom we met with, doesn't have the authority to investigate the appointment and

to balance the need for strong, entrepreneurial, potentially business-focused – and I'll be the first to argue that health care delivery is not a business; it's a service. However, this man is qualified. He's qualified, but he's in a position where he's been placed in conflict. The Ethics Commissioner's latitude or designation doesn't allow for that kind of a conflict, so that's a large concern that I have.

We also asked the Ethics Commissioner: how does the reporting of a potential lobbyist occur? For example, one of the things that Neil mentioned was that, you know, if a lobbyist, say, from a packing plant sees a person from a competing packing plant talking to the minister of agriculture at the bar, is that actual lobbying? Can he report the person for having this discussion with the minister of agriculture, who might potentially be directing cattle towards this particular slaughterhouse or packing plant facility? Again, he didn't really have an answer for that, but that was one of the ways he suggested that this lobbying reporting could take place.

I very much appreciate Neil Wilkinson's desire to talk to our caucus and give us a heads-up on his role as Ethics Commissioner. One of the other concerns that he brought up was: exactly how do you define a lobbyist, and when exactly is a lobbyist on or off duty? This was a very large concern. My feeling is that I'm paid as an MLA. Yes, there's an expectation that at some point I'm allowed to sleep and somehow I'm allowed to eat, but my job, as far as I'm concerned, is a 24/7 responsibility, and I'm paid a very fine sum to do that representation of my Calgary-Varsity constituents. Unless a person receives no funding whatsoever, how could they possibly fit the description of an unpaid lobbyist?

Sometimes when we look at things, we have to flip them over. Is a person who's having a beer after their 8 to 5 company job somehow able to distance themselves from the fact that they work for that particular company and any of the discussions are not of a lobbying nature? They're simply off the record, and it's a friendly, you know: "Can I buy you a beer?" "Sure. I'll get the peanuts on the next round." That remains elusive in terms of definition.

Another example of lobbying. It was very difficult for a number of members of the opposition and, I would think, for members of government to sometimes spend a Wednesday night in this Legislature because Wednesday nights were the wine-and-dine nights. The limousines pulled up and whisked the members away to be wined and dined and lobbied. So this lobbying has taken place. What I am saying is: where does the friendly camaraderie, the exchange with entrepreneurial friends, end and the lobbying begin?

Another problem that we discussed with the Ethics Commissioner, Neil Wilkinson, is the MLA's duty to report the potential of a lobbying influence. The rules are so vague that an MLA could honestly not be aware that they were being lobbied or pushed in a particular direction. Possibly it was just a discussion of mutual interest. But as soon as dollars or potentials come up, is an MLA responsible for reporting to the Ethics Commissioner that this discussion was held? Again, just from where I started off, if the MLA initiates that discussion, then there's no reporting required. I can just imagine the situation where an MLA comes in: "Don't say anything. Let me begin, and then the reporting isn't required." I believe that in order for this well-intentioned latest version of the Lobbyists Act to come forward, Bill 2, the Lobbyists Amendment Act, there are still holes, as individuals have indicated, that we could drive a truck through or, maybe, the high-speed train that we've long waited to surface in this province.

5:20

Speaking of the high-speed train and trains in general, we had Rod Love riding along on a government plane to talk to government ministers about the private rail company that he was recommending for the extension to be built in northern Alberta. The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo brought up the famous Kelley Charlebois, the

several hundred thousand dollar man who had his contracts broken up into a series of small pieces so that the bidding process of \$100,000 or less never entered into it until you started adding up the series of contracts.

If we are truly going to be transparent and accountable, then there is a lot of work to be done on Bill 2, the Lobbyists Amendment Act. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: There are five minutes for questions and comments. Any hon. member wish to do so?

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

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to rise and speak on this bill. I was on that committee that worked very hard and put many hours into trying to get this right. I think that often we don't know if we've really got it right until we start to use it and have an evaluation of it. I was disappointed that the original bill hadn't gone into practice much quicker than I was hoping it was going to. Hopefully, with this amendment act it will be put into practice, and further down the road we can have an evaluation to see if it really is meeting not only the mandate but also the intent of what this bill should be.

One of the things that I see in the amendment, that I questioned the first time around, is that sometimes I think the question should be: who is the lobbyist? Everybody else seems to be exempt – we're almost hard-pressed to find out who actually is going to be in this bill – and the revised definition will include individuals who are appointed to government committees, so now we have even less numbers of people having to register as lobbyists. I think that the bill is weak in many ways, but let's get it going. At least this amendment, hopefully, will make it move forward. I do think that there still are some loopholes left in this bill.

One of the things that was interesting was that a private citizen who came forward in the deliberations in the committee had suggested that perhaps we should have a reverse lobby so that the onus actually falls on the MLAs. I believe that it wouldn't be difficult to do that because I think we all know and have executive assistants that in fact know where we are every minute of the day, who we're meeting with, and if they don't know, certainly it's in our BlackBerry somewhere. I think that it might be easier for us as MLAs to just keep track of whom we've spoken to and why we've spoken to them. I think it's an idea that still bears keeping in the back of our mind when we do the evaluation on this bill.

One of the reasons that this lobbyist bill is very important, I believe, is because this government does a great deal of business behind closed doors. I think that Albertans need to know and should know who's meeting behind those closed doors. I don't think that they need to know every single detail, but I certainly think that they should know what the gist of the conversation was to be able to see which companies are lobbying the government and to see if, in fact, perhaps it's weighted, as we know it probably is, to friends. It's always good to know people in high places. I think it's fine as long as we know who those people are in those high places that are talking to the other people in high places.

Often, as my colleagues have already pointed out, the government's connections to industry and business go beyond the norm of professional relationships that come with wanting to support a competitive economy. There's nothing wrong with that. In fact, when I see the division in this House, the division between the government and the opposition, when the opposition can be considered the enemy, which I've had quoted about myself on more than one occasion, I think that's why we have to have open communication.

That's not the way it should be in this House. We should be able to work together. That's our job; that's what we're getting paid for. Whether we have different points of view is part of that process. I think that having closed-door meetings is not right when, in fact, we could be working together. The fact that the government would work with businesses is their job as well. But it's also the citizens' job to understand and know which companies are being given perhaps even an unfair advantage as to whom they actually have access.

I will probably speak again on this bill as we move along through it. At this point in time those are, really, all of my remarks.

The Deputy Speaker: We have five minutes for comment or questions.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: On the debate. It didn't seem like anybody was leaping to their feet to engage the Member for Lethbridge-East.

Thanks, Mr. Speaker. This legislation is long overdue. We'll do a section-by-section discussion in committee. In my reading of it, some of the amendments that are brought forward make sense. We'll see how it goes through debate. I am concerned with the delays. I'm losing track now of how long it has been since we've had the lobbyist registry promised.

I should point out that there is a bit of a record with Bill 1 – I think this was the flagship bill a year ago – in being slow to be implemented. If I go back before that, the access to the future fund I think was the result of Bill 1. That stalled. I mean, the legislation went through, but the promises there were never fulfilled. There was also a cancer legacy act, something to that effect, which was a Bill 1. Again, the legislation went through, but it was never fulfilled. I'm concerned that on bills 1 the track record of this government is a bit iffy. Considering that Bill 1 is supposedly the flagship bill, it's a concern for me. I'd like to keep this moving and get on with it. I think the Member for Lethbridge-East makes the point that we won't really know how this works until we try it. There are issues. Some of us will get caught up inadvertently, probably, in problems. We're going to have to test drive this.

I will say that it's a piece of legislation that brings Alberta into the 20th century, and for this government that's progress. It'd be nice if we were moving into the 21st century, but I'll take it as I get it from this government, one century at a time.

5:30

Clearly, we've called for a lobbyist registry for years. The Member for Calgary-Varsity quite properly linked this to broader issues of conflict of interest. But let's get on with it, Mr. Speaker. Let's get on with it.

With those comments I will move adjournment on this particular piece of legislation. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 3

Credit Union Amendment Act, 2009

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

Mr. Berger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to move second reading of the Credit Union Amendment Act, 2009.

The main purpose of this amendment is to give credit unions the ability to allow their members to vote for directors in advance of their annual general meeting. The Credit Union Act was amended in the spring of 2008, which among other things allowed for credit union member participation at meetings through electronic means.

As a result of subsequent discussions related to electronic participation, it was discovered that several credit unions, including some of the large credit unions, have allowed their members to vote for board members at their branches in advance of credit unions' AGMs. The use of advance polls in other circumstances, including provincial elections, is becoming commonplace. We feel that the ability to use advance polls could further credit union member participation at credit union meetings.

We are also proposing that this amendment retroactively validate those formal processes used by credit unions in the past that have counted voting done at advance polls. In doing so, we will preserve the past choices of credit union members for their board members and preserve the decisions made by boards and voted for in this manner. This will also reduce the possibility that these credit unions could be exposed to legal challenges based on the premise that since their board was not appointed in the Credit Union Act, the decisions made by that board are not valid. As these challenges would have the benefit of hindsight, the uncertainty surrounding a legal challenge could paralyze a credit union. We have not received any complaints regarding tampering or other concerns from members of credit unions that held advance polls.

As a matter of expediency we are also proposing a minor administrative change that would give credit unions more flexibility in the reporting requirements of credit union committees to their board. Credit unions have sufficient corporate governance policies in place such that this can be managed by the board.

Thank you, and I move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 4

Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2009

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

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today and move second reading of Bill 4, the Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2009.

The first amendment ensures further consistency with the roles and mandates policy framework for publicly funded postsecondary institutions, and the second amendment is a housekeeping matter relating to clarifying designation powers for graduate faculty councils and faculty councils.

As you will remember, the roles and mandates policy framework, approved by government in November of 2007, was developed to ensure that Alberta's postsecondary system aligns with the needs of students, taxpayers, and society at large. Furthermore, the framework enables sound decision-making to strategically and effectively invest public resources to address critical skilled labour shortages while at the same time creating a more educated society to respond to the growing need for knowledge workers. The framework also fosters broader and increased collaboration among institutions with a view to enhancing learner access through program and delivery mechanisms as well as pathways and transitions that maximize learner opportunities.

As you will know, Bill 7 was approved on October 21, 2008, to enshrine key components of the policy framework such as the six-sector model in the act. The six-sector model designates the roles and mandates of postsecondary institutions into six different sectors based on program responsibility, research activity, and regions served.

Among institutions identified are comprehensive academic and research institutions. This includes institutions like Athabasca University, the University of Alberta, the University of Calgary, and the University of Lethbridge. They have an academic focus, pure

research, where the majority of undergraduate and graduate programs are offered.

Baccalaureate and applied studies institutions, institutions such as Mount Royal College and Grant MacEwan. They have an emphasis on baccalaureate degrees, teaching, and applied research.

Polytechnical institutes, institutions such as NAIT and SAIT. These institutions provide the full range of technically related training such as baccalaureate and trades training as well as vocational education.

Comprehensive community institutions such as Grande Prairie, Red Deer, Lethbridge, and NorQuest College. In many respects they are stewards for that reason, responsible for ensuring a full range of programming from foundational learning and apprenticeship to certificate, diploma, and in some cases collaborative degrees.

Independent academic institutions. These are primarily faith-based with an emphasis on undergraduate programming with some graduate degree offering capabilities.

Specialized art and cultural institutions such as ACAD and the Banff Centre can grant baccalaureate and graduate degrees. Their focus, as their sector's name suggests, is very narrow. These are not institutions that are intended to be comprehensive teaching and research institutions.

Today's proposed amendment is a continuance of the alignment of the act to the policy framework, that of the use of the term "university." Currently the act restricts the use of the term "university." The original intent of this provision was to maintain control over the use of the term, including restricting Alberta's college system from using it in an effort to preserve the foundation of the community college system. However, with the implementation of the roles and mandates framework, it is timely to consider modernizing this provision by giving consideration to the broader use of the word "university." This amendment would allow institutions within the baccalaureate and applied studies sector such as Grant MacEwan and Mount Royal the option to apply to the minister for a formal name change that may include the term "university" in their title.

Without this amendment there are no other mechanisms to allow these institutions to use the word "university" in their name without dissolving them and establishing them as a university under the comprehensive academic and research institution category of the six-sector model, which would not be sustainable in Alberta. The proposed amendment has been intentionally restricted to baccalaureate and applied studies institutions because of that sector's focus in the policy framework. Specifically, this sector of the framework may grant diplomas, certificates, applied degrees, and baccalaureate degrees and may conduct applied research related to approved programs of study provided by the institution that led to the granting of baccalaureate degrees.

The second amendment is a housekeeping matter to ensure consistency and clarity for universities' processes related to the operation of their academic governance model. Stakeholders, in particular the Alberta Universities Association, have indicated that the authority to delegate is unclear in the current act other than for student discipline. In the Universities Act, one of the predecessors to the Post-secondary Learning Act, there was an overarching delegation power that allowed anybody constituted or continued by or under this act the power to delegate. With the amalgamation of the legislation into the Post-secondary Learning Act, this overarching provision was not retained for the universities. This amendment returns those powers to the current act and is consistent with the request from stakeholders.

I'd ask that members support Bill 4, and I move to adjourn debate. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

5:40

Bill 5
Marketing of Agricultural Products
Amendment Act, 2009

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and move second reading of Bill 5, the Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2009.

This act will amend the Marketing of Agricultural Products Act. No substantial changes have been made to the act since 1987. The proposed legislation will update it, simplify the wording, eliminate duplication, and make some minor amendments to clarify regulatory powers, including moving the review and appeal process into regulation.

The proposed amendments are the result of a review of existing legislation and industry consultations. In 2006 the Agricultural Products Marketing Council began an industry governance review, including a review of this act. The consultations included the 20 ag boards and commissions, a survey of producers who are not actively engaged in industry organizations, and, of course, meetings with other agricultural organizations in Alberta and across Canada. Over 400 individuals participated in the consultation process.

The review also included an examination of what changes other jurisdictions, including Australia, the United Kingdom, New Zealand, the Netherlands, have made to their ag industry governance. The feedback from the consultations has been compiled into 50 recommendations for change. Although many of the recommendations can be implemented through governance practices, others indicated a need for some legislative updates, which this amendment will do, Mr. Speaker.

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

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise to speak to Bill 5, the Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2009. The act, as the mover indicated, is largely a clerical sort of act, an act of correcting or updating wording and sorting out administrative issues.

It's actually great to see an agriculture bill come forward or any bill, frankly, these days that has minimal cost implications. We're not increasing spending here. We're actually probably streamlining. I think that's a good thing to do, and I'd like to see more of that from the government, to be honest with you. As I've said in here before – and I'm going to keep saying it because it's a profound concern – as a government we're spending per capita way more than most other provinces, dramatically more than B.C. and even more dramatically more than Ontario per capita. So if we're streamlining things here and making things move more efficiently, that's all to the good.

All of us rely heavily directly on the success of our agriculture sector. Supporting that sector in terms of marketing is a good thing. This bill, if you go back, actually has its roots way back, I think, in the 1960s, when significant steps were taken by the provincial government to support marketing of agricultural products. The system has gone through a series of overhauls and shifts and so on. This is more of a fine tuning. I don't think you'll get any particular objection from our caucus on this piece of legislation.

As the minister said before me, there was a lot of consultation. Given that it seems to be based on a lot of consultation, that it has very few cost implications, that it's largely a matter simply of administration and cleanup – I'm not going to go through section by section at this point in second reading – I expect that this legislation will receive the support of the opposition.

Given the hour I don't know that we need to prolong the debate a whole lot, but I know at least one of my colleagues would also like to speak to it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. As the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview pointed out, we are supportive of this initiative, which is to streamline the process to market the made-in-Alberta agricultural products. One of the things that I'm glad doesn't enter into this bill is the discussion about who's best placed to market agricultural products. I know there are varying degrees of antagonism against the Canadian Wheat Board, for example, in terms of marketing not only wheat but barley internationally, and sometimes we get into the arguments of co-operatives versus competitive and individual rights versus collective rights. Fortunately, we don't get mired in those kinds of debates within this particular bill.

It is important to note how far we've come. In Public Accounts when we were talking with the ag ministry and in some of the discussions within the House it has been pointed out that we have made major strides in age verification of our animals, and that has been one of the biggest barriers for trade. I believe the figure that I heard – and I know the minister of advanced education, who has a strong ag background, can tell me if I'm wrong – is that 85 per cent of animals are now age verified. With the concerns that we had with regard to BSE and when the potential BSE would show up in an animal and all the research that's been done on prions and so on, I think Alberta has made some major strides since that first breakout of BSE, when the animals weren't tested for a three-month period because we only had one person doing the testing, and that person was preoccupied with CWD.

We're at a point where we can say to the world that our products are superior. We can verify the age of the beef we export. We can take on protectionist outfits in the States like R-CALF and say that Alberta beef is number one. We can verify for expansion markets, such as Japan, that we have taken strong safety measures to protect our animals. I'm hoping that with all of the research that is taking place in Alberta, we'll very soon be able to announce to the world that through Alberta research we have a live test for BSE in animals. Once we can do that, verify in an inexpensive manner, then for a large part of our agricultural product, our shipping of beef in the box, to quote the advanced education minister, we can sell our finished product as opposed to a live product, and that's the key to success in Alberta.

We started off as an agricultural province. That's where our roots are. We have that proud tradition. Bill 5, the Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2009, will only tend to strengthen our reputation as one of Canada's top agricultural producers, with the best product the world can buy.

Thank you. I would like to call upon the Assembly to adjourn debate on Bill 5 if that is their wish.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In view of the hour I move that we adjourn until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:50 p.m. to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

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