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The 27th Legislature
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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.

Thursday, February 19, 2009

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon and welcome.

Let us pray. As we close this week and we look forward in anticipation to going visiting with our constituents, may we also take this opportunity to thank all the people of Alberta for the wonderful benefits this province receives on a daily basis. Amen.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a very special guest seated in your gallery, Mr. Krishan Joshee. Mr. Joshee has a long record of volunteer community service and is a recipient of numerous awards, including the Order of Canada. He has been a pillar of the community and a truly outstanding Albertan. All of us are fully aware of his unbelievable service as the chair of the Wild Rose Foundation, that has helped so many groups not only in Alberta and Canada but in countries around the world. He's been a tremendous ambassador for the province of Alberta.

I just want to thank you on behalf of all Albertans for your years of dedicated service, and we wish you all of the blessings of continued good health.

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

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a very special guest who's seated in your gallery. My guest today is Mr. Clint Dunford. Clint was a member of this Assembly for approximately 14 years, served in numerous cabinet posts, continues to be a community activist and a great volunteer in Lethbridge. We're just happy to see him here in Edmonton. I'd ask him to rise and receive the warm reception of this House.

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

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to rise today to introduce to you and through you a very prominent developer in Alberta, Dr. Prem Singhmar, sitting in your gallery. Dr. Singhmar's contributions to this province are too numerous to list. A couple of highlights include donating significant amounts of money towards establishing the Singhmar centre for education inside the Art Gallery of Alberta as well as donating to the University of Alberta to create a new chair in classical Indian polity and society and supporting countless other programs and organizations. Thank you, Dr. Singhmar, for everything you have done for this province and no doubt will continue to do. I would ask that you please rise and accept the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we also have in the Speaker's gallery today three very distinguished individuals: Ms Coleen Neita, the honorary consul of Jamaica in the province of Alberta; Mr. Broodhagen, president of the National Black Coalition of Canada;

and Ms Cheryl Allen, the business coordinator for the National Black Coalition of Canada here in Edmonton in the province of Alberta. These three distinguished people are now a part of Black History Month in Canada and North America.

Welcome.

Introduction of Guests

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, a real privilege again today to introduce three classes of students from Sherwood Park. They come from Lakeland Ridge school. Lakeland Ridge public school is one of the first schools to be built for Catholic and Protestant students as well as two government departments dealing with employment and also dealing with income supports as well as having the children's services there. It's a school that offers a great deal to the community. Today there are 72 students. They're accompanied by teachers Jay Robertson, Lindy Mair, and Sonya Bushell along with parent helpers Jenn Gray, Karin Solberg-Wells, Karen Boyle, and Corrine Thompson. I would ask if they would please stand and the Assembly please give them a warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly today Mr. Darby Tchir, a resident from the county of Lac La Biche who is currently attending Concordia college in Edmonton. Darby is an active citizen who is involved in youth politics.

With Darby are his friends Stephen Boutin and Brittani Rael from the United States of America. Two years ago Darby and Stephen participated in an internship with a presidential classroom in Washington, DC, which prepares young men and women in the roles of leaders in public service and private enterprise. Stephen and Brittani have travelled to Alberta to visit Darby and to see what our great province is about.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask that the three individuals rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It certainly is my pleasure to make an introduction on behalf of the hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly seven hard-working members of our public service. They are joining us today as part of the public service orientation tour. These individuals work in the Ministry of Seniors and Community Supports in the area of freedom of information and privacy and legislative services. I'm pleased to welcome Kent Ziegler, Cindy Want, Janice Rechlo, Sunny Menon, Jennifer Inda, Sharon Getty, and Kathy Robinson. On behalf of my hon. colleague I would ask our guests to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly 14 members of the Taoist Tai Chi Society of Canada led by Cathy Baas. Cathy is a role model for all of us. She's a long-term member of the society, she's a volunteer instructor, and she happens to be in her mid-80s. You may have noticed as you entered the Chamber today that they, myself, and other hon. members of this Assembly were

demonstrating how to cultivate the mind, body, and soul through the art of Taoist tai chi. We would like to thank them for helping Albertans to maintain healthy and independent lifestyles by improving their health, their fitness, and their balance, thus preventing falls and reducing injuries and hospitalizations. Mr. Speaker, they are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

1:40

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly two outstanding volunteers from St. John Ambulance. Last week I attended a ceremony recognizing the top three volunteers for 2008. The third place volunteer, Kathie Robinson, could not be with us today. However, I have to say that she volunteered 12,000 hours in the last eight years for St. John Ambulance.

Second place went to Dean Smith. While volunteering countless hours for St. John's, Dean has always displayed an enthusiastic and positive attitude towards the program. In 2008 he volunteered over 480 hours of patient service while attending 64 community events.

First place went to Melanie Peters. In 2008 she accounted for over 7 per cent of the total volunteer hours in Edmonton.

I'll be discussing more about St. John Ambulance in my member's statement later this afternoon. Mr. Speaker, it takes very special people to do what these people have done. I would ask them all to rise now and receive the traditional warm greeting of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Jacobs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very happy today to rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly some very good friends of mine from Cardston, Alberta. Melvin and Elva Pitcher are long-time residents of Cardston. They raised a great family there, they've run a successful business there for many years, and they are pillars of that community. They are accompanied today by their grandson Tanner Allred, who is a university student in Edmonton. I'm very happy to welcome them here today. They are seated in the members' gallery. I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased and honoured to have some special people from a very special organization joining us in the public gallery today. A little bit later I'll be doing a member's statement to celebrate an achievement of theirs. For now I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly three people who are associated with the Greater Edmonton Foundation Housing for Seniors. The chairperson of the board, J. Lawrence Tymko; Raymond Swonek, the executive director; and Susan McCarthy, who is the public relations manager with the Greater Edmonton Foundation are joining us. I would ask them to please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very happy today to be able to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the House two members of my family, one of my immediate family and one of my extended family: my son, Scott Taylor, who is home

for reading week from the University of Victoria, where he is a third-year history major and poli-sci minor; and my nephew, his cousin, Chris Bowden of Edmonton, who graduated from Concordia university with a bachelor of arts in history and a minor in political science and is currently completing an after degree in secondary education at the University of Alberta with a social studies major and a language arts minor. He has completed his first practicum at Crestwood junior high, and – I should say this for my colleague – he's a resident of the fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre. Chris Bowden and Scott Taylor, if you would rise, please, and accept the warm welcome of the House.

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 21 individuals, sponsors and supporters of Camp fYrefly and from the Institute for Sexual Minority Studies and Services. Camp fYrefly is the major community outreach initiative of the Institute for Sexual Minority Studies and Services at the University of Alberta. The camp, which is now expanding nationally, was founded in 2004 by Dr. André P. Grace and Mr. Kristopher Wells and is now supported by many community, individual, government, and corporate donors. Camp fYrefly provides vital support for queer and questioning youth in need, and this should be a source of great pride to all Albertans. I would now ask my 21 guests seated in the public gallery representing both the institute and Camp fYrefly to rise to receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

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

St. John Ambulance Volunteers

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On February 10 I attended an event celebrating volunteers for St. John Ambulance, more specifically the two volunteers that I introduced earlier, Melanie Peters and Dean Smith. I was excited to attend an event that recognized the commitment, dedication, and enthusiasm of volunteers in this province.

Volunteers help to relieve the pressures that arise from the changing demographics of our communities, the rapid growth of our urban populations, and the lack of adequate services and manpower necessary to accommodate all of these needs. Volunteers are what make a difference in our communities, and for all of this we are very thankful for their time and effort and energy.

Before I was an MLA, my background, among other things, focused on occupational safety. I am a huge health and safety guy, but I was also a volunteer firefighter, and I know what it takes to do this kind of work. That's why I think it's so incredible for the volunteers of St. John Ambulance and other organizations to do what they do. The volunteers of St. John Ambulance donated approximately 80,000 hours last year. It's an incredible number. Their contribution to the province is simply unmeasurable.

I would like to thank all of the volunteers in Alberta and especially the two here from St. John. Thank you.

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

Alberta 55 Plus Winter Games

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to take this opportunity to speak to the House about a very special event taking

place in Lethbridge this week. The city will play host to the first-ever Alberta 55 Plus Winter Games and the thousand-plus athletes that will descend on Lethbridge for the four-day event.

Now, you may be aware that the games have been held many times before under the banner of the Alberta Seniors Games before changing their name to 55 Plus. This is the first formal 55 Plus games and will attract an active and vibrant group that competes in all sports at a very high level of competition with the primary goal of sportsmanship and camaraderie.

A group of core volunteers has been planning the logistics of the games for the past six months, and that's no easy task when you have over a thousand competitors coming to town. You have to make sure those folks have their needs taken care of: a roof over their heads, food to keep them going, and directions on how to reach the venues and competitions. That's even more difficult when you factor in the broad range of activities from curling, bowling, hockey, table tennis, cross-country and downhill skiing, snooker, badminton, shuffleboard, cribbage, and many, many more.

The community has truly risen to the challenge, Mr. Speaker. More than 700 tireless volunteers have been working day and night to make sure the games come off without a hitch, not to mention the many people who have opened their homes to the athletes. As well, both the Lethbridge Senior Citizens Organization and Nord-Bridge Seniors Centre have been instrumental in bringing the games to fruition. I'd like to also thank the University of Lethbridge for donating their downtown building as the headquarters. I would especially like to thank Chairman Paul Stevenson, Games Manager Collin Beazer, and their dedicated board and volunteers for over 20,000 volunteer hours already invested in the games.

The opening ceremonies are planned for today, with the games continuing until closing ceremonies on Monday. Our Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation will be opening the event. I'm looking forward to attending, and I invite everyone to join us in Lethbridge for exciting games and a great party.

Thank you.

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

Greater Edmonton Foundation

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to celebrate and congratulate the Greater Edmonton Foundation Housing for Seniors, or GEF, as it is more informally known. In January GEF received a ranking of 29 out of 50 for the best small and medium employers in Canada. The winners were chosen from over 250 participants who registered in the study. Study partners include the Queen's School of Business, Queen's Centre for Business Venturing, and Hewitt Associates.

Joining us in the public gallery today are representatives of the Greater Edmonton Foundation: Board Chair Lawrence Tymko, Executive Director Raymond Swonek, and Susan McCarthy, the public relations manager.

The finalists in this study are a pretty impressive group, ranging from car sales to video game and software providers to telecommunications and biopharmaceutical research, but I'm proud to say that the Greater Edmonton Foundation is the only not-for-profit service provider on the list. Tough competition, so it tells you just how good this organization is. Running a small- or a medium-sized business is a steep hill to climb, but running a not-for-profit service organization is like climbing Mount Everest.

That leads me to the best part. This award really honours the staff. The ranking the organization receives is based on employee surveys and opinions, so it's about how they feel about the organization, and

it's about their leadership. According to what I've read, staff are pretty pumped about the executive director, Raymond Swonek, and I know he is a big fan of the work, dedication, and compassion that the staff bring in the door every day.

This year, 2009, also marks the 50th anniversary of GEF operations. This wonderful nonprofit provides affordable housing and supportive living services to senior citizens in 11 apartment buildings, some of which are in the fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre, nine lodges, and two duplex homes. GEF is a management body created by the province of Alberta and legislated by Alberta Housing.

Please join me in applauding this example of excellence in the nonprofit sector and seniors housing sector. Thank you so much for your leadership, compassion, and exemplary performance.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Provincial Fiscal Policies

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today the finance minister gave a news conference that repeated previously announced economic initiatives to cloud the fact that this government has mismanaged the Alberta economy. For years this government has ignored the advice of experts to save during times of plenty, and now, once again, Alberta is in trouble. A former Premier admitted there was no plan for the boom. Will this Premier admit there is no plan for the bust?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the hon. Treasurer today delivered a report that shows that our savings fund, the heritage savings trust fund, has taken a loss, but I would submit that if we would have listened to the advice of the member across, we would have lost even more money through this unbelievable economic turmoil. On the operational side – the hip replacements, policing – all of the operational costs of government are balanced. This is the loss on the savings account, the heritage savings trust fund.

Dr. Swann: Well, let me try that again, Mr. Speaker. Will this Premier admit that there was no plan for the bust?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, to set aside close to \$14 billion in cash, liquidity: we're the only jurisdiction in North America to do that, to have this fund to cushion the rapid drop in oil and gas prices and forestry and agriculture. We're all feeling the effects of the economic downturn, but this is cash that now will cushion. We can use that over the next few years so that we don't have to continue to run large debts like other jurisdictions are going to do.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, the heritage fund today is worth less in real dollars than it was 20 years ago. To the Premier: how does this reflect our commitment from nonrenewable resource wealth to future generations?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, since '93-94 we've seen a net gain in this province of over \$50 billion. That's paying off an accumulated debt of about \$22 billion, \$23 billion; about 3 and a half billion dollars in endowments; \$14 billion in the savings account. We have another \$13 billion or so in the heritage savings trust fund. That was a lot of gain, a net gain of \$50 billion over the last 15 years. You know, we've done well. The other thing is that last year we had the

unbudgeted surpluses, and we asked that they go into the sustainability account. Had we put them into the heritage trust fund, we would have lost even more. So this is a very good plan.

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

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This province had an amazing opportunity over the last five years to set itself apart from boom-and-bust cycles by saving its resource revenue. We could have continued on with balanced budgets. We could have been protected from uncertain times like now. Instead almost \$10 billion has come and gone within the last year. Our health care is in dire straits. Our savings are shrinking to preboom levels. To the Minister of Finance and Enterprise: will she admit that it was wrong for this government to ignore the warning signs to reduce Alberta's reliance on oil and gas and to stop relying on those dollars to fund core programs?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, the line of questioning today misses the very obvious fact that all Albertans know: with the downturn in the economy your investments aren't going to make money. That's global. That's reality. That's what happened today. There's no mismanagement. That's what's happening. What we have done with the savings, as the Premier has identified, has been responsible. We've brought up our standards of teaching to the efforts that the Learning Commission asked for, a thousand new teachers, policemen. We've accommodated a hundred thousand people in one single year, built extra infrastructure. Anybody in this Assembly should be proud of that record.

Mr. Taylor: Now, Mr. Speaker, by the finance minister's own admission earlier today at the media conference, this government is in effect rounding up the empties to take back to the bottle depot, going through the sofa, looking for the loose change that slipped between the cushions to pay for the rest of the spending for this year. What's it going to do next year? The few billion in the sustainability fund is not going to last very long.

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, stay tuned. We will be delivering a third-quarter result. Subsequent to that, in a few short weeks, we will be delivering a budget, and we will talk about next year. Today's efforts were to enlighten Albertans about what is happening in this state of economy so that we reduce that expectation of the good times of fast-growing revenues and the kinds of things that they may have seen in the past that we are seeing coming to an end. The industries that are calling in to look for help from this government and are getting counselling about where to go for advice for industry skills training and so on are appreciating the fact today that we've come forward to set the tone for Albertans so they understand our economic realities.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, it sounds to me like the minister spent the day pouring cold water on the sunshine and puppies outlook of the throne speech 10 days ago.

If, as the minister stated, there won't be any cuts to programs, why is the minister continuing to delay releasing the budget? We've already heard the worst, haven't we? What else are you hiding?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's almost a daily question except when the hon. member doesn't bring it forward. I have indicated that we're working very carefully on the budget. I think today's comments to the media and to Albertans was an effort to let them

know how very difficult it is when we get into a constricted economic situation. We are gearing down from a tremendously high boom to a situation where we've got to make tough choices, targeted, intelligent choices about reallocations. Ministers are doing that every day. Ministers are talking about it. The Minister of Service Alberta identified an expenditure that was not going to be spent this year. We're making some of those choices. We'll have those ready for Albertans very soon.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Returning Officer Appointments

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Deputy Premier failed to answer basic questions about the appointment of returning officers for the last election. On an issue that important the Deputy Premier needs to be open and accountable to Albertans. My question is back to the Deputy Premier. How does he justify to this Assembly a policy in which six written requests from the Chief Electoral Officer, an officer of this Assembly, are ignored and the key nonpartisan responsibility of appointing returning officers is turned over to a political party?

The Speaker: The hon. the Deputy Premier.

Mr. Stevens: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I think the Justice minister should respond to this.

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

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've had the opportunity to review the suggestions that have been made by the hon. member. Our records do indicate that responses were made appropriately at the time, that requests made by the Chief Electoral Officer were responded to, and that's all we could do.

Dr. Taft: That's pretty pathetic, then, isn't it?

Mr. Speaker, the Chief Electoral Officer contacted this government six different times in writing about appointing returning officers, and the Deputy Premier was the person receiving those submissions. Does the Deputy Premier really expect Albertans to believe that he cannot remember this happening, or is he simply hiding the truth?

Speaker's Ruling Questions about a Previous Responsibility

The Speaker: Well, actually, if we look at Beaudesne 409(6), it says:

A question must be within the administrative competence of the Government. The Minister to whom the question is directed is responsible to the House for his or her present Ministry and not for any decisions taken in a previous portfolio.

So it's appropriate that the Minister of Justice and Attorney General be the one who responds.

Returning Officer Appointments (continued)

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I understood the suggestion to be that the government did not respond to the request, and I'm advising the House that it is my information as Minister of Justice that we did respond to the request.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

2:00

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Justice: is she saying that in testimony last week the Chief Electoral Officer lied or misled the Legislative Offices Committee when he indicated that he did not receive a response from the then Justice minister?

Ms Redford: I won't draw a conclusion either way, Mr. Speaker. I will simply advise the House that it is my information and I have been advised that we did respond to the request.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Resource Revenues

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. The finance minister today announced that Alberta is facing a \$1 billion deficit this year. While I am happy that the minister has found a definition of deficit that will keep her out of jail, she can't hide the economic mismanagement of this government. Money and jobs are flowing out of Alberta in torrents, and the government doesn't care. My question is to the finance minister. Why won't she admit that the world's lowest royalty rates have already cost the Alberta government billions upon billions of dollars and have thrown the province into deficit?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, I will not admit that. In fact, the reason that we have a declining revenue picture today is totally attributable to the global recession and the fact that our investments have not made the money that we had hoped they would make. In fact, on the investment picture, they have lost money. We have not been in that situation for well over a decade, where collectively we haven't seen the heritage fund generate sufficient revenue to support budgets or support other kinds of activities. Unfortunately, this year that's the harsh reality.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The other harsh reality is that we've lost billions of dollars because the government has the lowest royalty rates in the world.

Now, this government knows that other governments around the world are recognizing the need for stimulus spending except the hidebound Tories in Alberta. This government believes in business as usual. My question is again to the finance minister. How can you look Albertans in the eye who've just lost their jobs and tell them that you are not going to have a stimulus package in the next budget?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, clearly the loss of a job is something that we feel compassionate about and we really don't just overlook. Our Ministry of Employment and Immigration strives very carefully to make sure that programs are in place to counsel people and to find other opportunities. In my own ministry, Finance and Enterprise, we look for ways to help businesses that might be floundering. But the situation that we find ourselves in with our economy spending more per capita than any other province in Canada is that if we sustain this level of the economy, as the Premier has committed relative to reducing our expenditure but keeping our contracts in place, we are still doing more in this province for the people of Alberta than they are in any other single place, on a background of the lowest taxes in any place in Canada.

Mr. Mason: Frankly, I don't think that statement would have any credibility with an unemployed person, Mr. Speaker.

This Tory government has always been prepared to cut programs for people in tough economic times while protecting subsidies to their friends in big oil. We heard that again today. The government will be cutting the Green TRIP program, which supports public transit, but it is going to keep the \$2 billion subsidy for carbon capture and storage. Again to the finance minister: why is this government cutting support to municipalities for public transit and maintaining at the same time a \$2 billion subsidy to some of the biggest polluters on the face of the planet?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, when I talked about what we would be doing, I said that we would be taking down the barriers that were barriers to doing business, that we would be increasing the dollars available for green technologies. Ultimately, that will see the phase-in of the Green TRIP. But the lighthouse, the single most important pinnacle, I believe, that Albertans should be justifiably proud of, echoed, by the way, by the President of the United States of America, is our commitment by our Premier to carbon capture and storage. We will be the leaders in technology that will support better and greener industry.

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

Alberta Adolescent Recovery Centre

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My constituents along with many other Albertans value the services provided by the Alberta Adolescent Recovery Centre, or AARC, located in my constituency. Many people are upset with the recent accusations made against this facility, and I am one of them. To the minister of health: can you tell us how many youth benefit from attending this facility?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I can't specifically because it is not a facility that the Alberta government owns and operates, but it's my understanding that several hundred have. What I can tell you is that I've had conversations with, I would say, at least a dozen different parents who have chosen to have their child admitted to the facility, and they speak glowingly. In fact, what they will tell you is that they believe it saved their child. I think one of the things that probably many of us in this Assembly do not have the ability to comprehend is the feeling that a parent has when they believe they have probably reached the end of the line and there is only one ray of hope and that's to seek these kinds of services.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Denis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: can this minister please explain how youth end up being admitted to AARC?

Mr. Liepert: Well, as I said in my first answer, Mr. Speaker, parents do commit their own addicted children to the program. In some cases they are referred to the program by the judiciary. There may be some involvement with government services that might be seeking placement for troubled adolescents. There are a variety of ways, but there is certainly always parental involvement that is part of the program.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Denis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister of Health and Wellness: how does this facility fit into the government's overall strategy to provide treatment services for the youth of this province?

Mr. Liepert: Well, I don't know that there's much else that I can add to what I've said in my previous two answers, Mr. Speaker. I do want to add one thing, though. I was in contact this morning with Dr. Dean Vause, who is the executive director of AARC, and he wanted me to know that at his own initiative he has asked the Calgary Police Service to come in to conduct any kind of an investigation they want to conduct, to interview, talk to anyone they want to within the program. I encouraged him to continue to do that, and by doing that, I wouldn't make any further comments.

Prosecutions under the Election Act

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, when allegations of tampering with evidence emerge in a freedom of information case relating to flight logs, the Minister of Justice appointed a special prosecutor. This move, for which I applaud her, ensured that someone separate and apart from the government investigated these concerns. To the Minister of Justice: given having free and fair elections, the protection of democracy, should be priority one for any Justice minister, why wasn't a special prosecutor brought in to investigate the 19 election violations recommended for prosecution by the just-let-go Chief Electoral Officer?

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

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said yesterday in this House, we have a process with an independent prosecution service that conducts their work efficiently and effectively. They balance the needs of the justice system. They balance the needs of prosecutions. They make decisions as to whether or not prosecutions should take place, and in cases where there could be a perceived conflict of interest, a special prosecutor could be appointed. That is not the case in these circumstances.

Mr. Hehr: I understand what the minister is saying, but why wouldn't there be a conflict of interest when we have election violations that could be happening with any party, including the hon. minister's party, that runs the government? Why wouldn't there be a perceived conflict of interest?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think that it is very important, as I said yesterday in this House, to recall that one of the conditions that prosecutors must consider when they're deciding whether or not to prosecute a case is to look at the circumstances and determine whether or not the situation can be corrected without a prosecution so that we are not inadvertently persecuting people that perhaps made honest mistakes. It is my understanding from discussions with my department and the advice that I've received on the conversations that were held with the Chief Electoral Officer that in the cases where the Chief Electoral Officer brought this information to the attention of the prosecutors, the situations were resolved, inadvertent errors were corrected, and the matters were dealt with.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much. Nevertheless, it didn't quite answer the question. What I asked was: how can it not be a conflict of interest when the minister's department is investigating alleged election violations that could have been committed by her own party? How is it not a classic case of a conflict of interest?

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would start by saying that the question has been asked and answered, but I will actually supplement. I will say that within the Department of Justice we have strong prosecutors who make decisions on their own, of their own volition, as to whether or not to prosecute cases, and they made decisions not to do that.

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

Forest Industry Sustainability

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Unfortunately, over the past several weeks a number of Alberta forest companies have announced production curtailments and staff layoffs because of continued weak markets. My question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. My constituents are asking: what can this government do to assist this sector?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd also like to thank the hon. member for Athabasca-Redwater for a very timely question. There have been a significant number of closures, curtailments, and layoffs in the industry over the past number of months, and I want all of those companies and affected communities to know that their MLAs have been very diligent in communicating the distress of their communities to myself and to the rest of cabinet. We're working closely with the companies in affected communities to deal with those issues. We have a number of proposals on the go, but we're doing this all the while respecting the softwood lumber agreement with the United States.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the minister tell us what immediate measures are under way to restore the health of Alberta's forest industry?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can. When I was appointed a minister with responsibility for forestry, I immediately appointed a committee, the Forest Industry Sustainability Committee. I've received two reports from that committee, an initial interim report and a final report. Last September we accepted all 11 recommendations of the interim report. We're implementing those now. Some of those include using community development trust money for putting unemployed workers to work on things like the FireSmart projects. My honourable colleague next to me with Employment and Immigration has \$8.2 million dealing with worker retraining and retention. These programs focus on communities and individuals affected by the downturn in the industry.

The final report from FISC we've received. I'm working now with other cabinet ministers to see which of those recommendations for medium and long-term reform we can achieve this year, and I'll be releasing that report later this spring.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question is to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. Sadly, I have constituents who have lost their jobs in this sector even in the last two weeks. What programs and supports can Albertans expect from your department to help them get back to work as soon as possible?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our staff are helping workers to look for new jobs or set up educational or retraining plans for themselves. We're also making full use of the community development trust fund to help forestry-dependent communities. We're in the communities. We're working with their communities. We've earmarked a fair amount of resources for forestry initiatives and economic development in the most hard-hit communities, and we plan a lot more activities in the upcoming year. As the hon. minister of SRD has indicated, we're also supporting retraining of forest workers at various colleges and foundations and institutions as well as working with them on projects to increase their productivity.

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

Returning Officer Appointments (continued)

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This morning we learned that the government has a financial deficit. Last night we learned, unfortunately, that the government has a democratic deficit when they fired the Chief Electoral Officer of this province. Mr. Gibson was fired for working hard to fix the democratic deficit.

Mr. Hancock: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. MacDonald: My first question is to the Premier. How can the provincial elections in this province be considered to be conducted in a fair and independent manner when the Progressive Conservative Party has sole authority to appoint the returning officers for the provincial elections?

Mr. Stevens: Mr. Speaker, as the Government House Leader rose on a point of order, I'm sure it's in relation to the misinformation contained in the preamble to the question. The issue that occurred last night was before a committee of this Assembly – it is not the government – and it was the decision of that particular committee going through the usual process that that committee goes through that gave rise to the decision that the hon. member is talking about.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's very interesting given that a government member on that committee announced to the press last Friday, when we initially had a meeting, that the gentlemen was going to be fired the following week, and you know, that turned out to be true.

Mr. Hancock: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. MacDonald: Again to the Premier: when Mr. Gibson refused to sign the recommendation . . .

The Speaker: Hold on, hon. member. Just a second.
The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Xiao: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for giving me the opportunity . . .

The Speaker: No, no. Are you rising on a point of order?

Mr. Xiao: Yes.

The Speaker: And the Government House Leader?

Mr. Hancock: Same one.

The Speaker: Okay. I'm putting them all down, and we'll deal with them later.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that.

Again to the Premier: when Mr. Gibson refused to sign the recommendation for the order in council to appoint returning officers for the two by-elections which occurred in 2007, what did the government tell Mr. Gibson?

Mr. Stevens: Mr. Speaker, those are specifics of which I have no knowledge.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. Again, they're in the testimony that was provided to the committee that the hon. member referred to earlier.

Who at the Progressive Conservative headquarters was given the responsibility by the government to appoint the returning officers on Mr. Gibson's behalf?

Mr. Stevens: Well, the aspect that deals with the government, Mr. Speaker, is that ultimately I believe it's an order in council that appoints the returning officers. That is a government responsibility that I can comment on.

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

Recreational Access Management Plan

Mr. Jacobs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The University of Calgary recently held a working group of interested parties to look at increasing hunting and fishing opportunities on private land and encourage wildlife stewardship. There are many Albertans who are concerned about the recreational management program, acronym RAMP, resulting from that workshop. My question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. What will the department's recreational access management plan do?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The main goal of RAMP is a three-year pilot project starting this fall, one, to increase public access to private lands for hunting and angling and, secondly, the protection and maintenance of habitat. Landowners in two wildlife units in southern Alberta will receive financial support from Alberta Sustainable Resource Development to provide recreational access to their land and stewardship of wildlife habitat. Two-thirds of the land in southern Alberta is private land. If you care about wildlife, you have to care about the habitat that they depend upon for healthy

populations. This is about wildlife, the habitat they depend upon. That's what RAMP is about.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Jacobs: Thank you. My first supplemental, Mr. Speaker, is to the same minister. Are you not concerned that RAMP will be seen as a paid hunting and fishing program?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The law of Alberta is very clear on this. It prohibits absolutely any payment for access for hunting. RAMP does not do this. The only money that will pass here is between the government of Alberta and landowners for habitat maintenance and public access. There'll be no privileged access for private hunters of any type based on the RAMP program. The law, as it always has been, will be enforced on a go-forward basis.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Jacobs: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, my last question to the same minister: how will RAMP enhance Alberta's wildlife habitat?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Half of the compensation module that will be paid to landowners is based on habitat protection and management. The key to healthy wildlife populations is good habitat. As I've already stated, two-thirds of that habitat is on private land. That will be the focus of half of the RAMP program. If this is done properly in the pilot project – I'm confident that it will be, and of course we'll monitor the satisfaction with the pilot project before we go forward. Healthy habitat, healthy populations: this has the opportunity to be a win for landowners, a win for Alberta's hunters and anglers, and a win for Alberta's environment.

Thank you.

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

Primrose East Bitumen Spill

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In January 2009 about 500 barrels of bitumen seeped from the CNRL project at the Primrose East field, north of Cold Lake. There are questions around what is happening at the site now and whether the cause of the spill has been contained and if there has been any groundwater contamination. My first question is to the Minister of Energy. Can the minister confirm that such a release occurred at the CNRL Primrose East site, and can we get a firm figure on how much bitumen was spilled into the environment?

2:20

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, the truth of the matter is that I don't think that anybody could confirm the absolute amount of leakage from any containment reservoir across the province of Alberta, so I'm afraid that at this point in time I'd not be able to answer such a question. She wouldn't have the answer, and neither would I.

Ms Blakeman: Well, you could've tried harder.

To the Minister of Environment: what involvement has the ministry had in ensuring that there has been no contamination of

groundwater from the leak? Is the ministry on-site with the ERCB, or is the company self-monitoring?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not familiar with this specific incident. I'll be happy to get some briefing from my officials to find out the specifics on this case. But I can talk about how we deal with such incidents in general. Yes, there is a degree of self-reporting that's involved in these things, but there's also an auditing provision that is part of the ministry. There is a responsibility on the part of industry to report any incidents. Once that has taken place, there's an ongoing monitoring. There's groundwater monitoring that would come into effect. I'm satisfied that our officials have the matter well in hand.

Ms Blakeman: Well, good. I look forward to what the minister can report back to us on that.

While he's at it, if he could also answer this. Given that kill fluid is being brought in day and night to the site, can the minister tell us if the leak has been successfully mitigated by this fluid, and if not – I'm sorry. This question should be directed to the Minister of Energy. My apologies.

Okay. Kill fluid is brought in day and night. Can the minister tell us if the leak has been mitigated by this fluid, and if not, is the cause of the leak a fracture in the formation?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would suggest that the direction of that question was more appropriate in her first instance, so I would ask the hon. Minister of Environment to respond.

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, as with the first question, I'm not familiar and have not been briefed on this specific example. I'll get the information and provide it to the member.

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

Sexual Orientation and Human Rights

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Tuesday the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit told the Legislature that he wants to "strive to make sure that we continue to support the diversity and economic well-being of all Albertans." Unfortunately, this commitment has not yet been extended to sexual minorities as he continues to refuse to add sexual minority status alongside ethnicity, race, or religion to the Alberta human rights code. The organizers and youth involved in Camp fYrefly were here today because they demand better from their government. To the minister: why won't you ensure that sexual minorities are protected under our human rights code by amending the legislation this session?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I had mentioned before, we've undertaken a review of the Human Rights Commission in its entirety since April of last year. We are looking at the different recommendations made by the Sheldon Chumir foundation and others. We have just appointed a new chief commissioner as our first step at looking at reforming the administrative process. Looking at the process, legislation is one particular aspect of that, and we are looking at that. When we have a proposal to make to my colleagues with respect to cabinet and caucus, then we'll go ahead and look at that.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This process has been going on under this minister for almost a year now. On Tuesday the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit stood in the House and said that Alberta offers “a great opportunity to raise my family.” I wish this was the case for all, but it’s not. Homophobia has not ended, even 10 years after the Vriend decision. To this minister: why does the government continue to give a wink-wink, nudge-nudge to homophobes and gay-bashers by refusing to include sexual orientation in our human rights code?

Mr. Blakett: Mr. Speaker, it pains me, actually, to have to even respond to that. The fact is that the Supreme Court had written in protection for gays and lesbians in the province of Alberta during the Vriend decision. There has not been an instance – and I dare the opposition member to come up with an example – of one person in this province who has not had a chance to take their case before the Alberta Human Rights Commission and has not seen their complaint dealt with in a proper, efficient, and equitable fashion.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, Albertans should not have to look to a bunch of judges out in Ottawa to provide the human rights protection that every other Canadian receives from their provincial government. It sounds like the minister is unaware of the struggles that sexual minority youth and their families face. There is name-calling, vandalism, social exclusion, and bullying. While education is great, how can you expect Albertans to take it seriously when this government itself is not prepared to stand up to homophobes and do the right thing and change the legislation now?

Mr. Blakett: Mr. Speaker, we do not make changes to legislation or look at forming legislation or making amendments to any particular body just because of the whim of one particular individual in this House. We took the time and we will take the time to get it right. We took a year to come up with a chief commissioner of the Human Rights Commission. I ask you: is anybody in this House saying that that person is not above reproach, is not a qualified person, is not the best that we could do? Albertans demand that we get it right and we take the time to do it. Unlike yourself, we do not believe in knee-jerk responses for the betterment of 3 and a half million Albertans, and it’s 3 and half million Albertans that we have in mind.

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

Redrawing of Municipal Ward Boundaries

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On February 9 Calgary’s city council voted to redraw the boundaries of the city’s wards, which has resulted in a significant shift in the location of ward 10. The residents of this ward are furious that they were not consulted. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: are there any rules or regulations that govern the redrawing of ward boundaries in Alberta’s municipalities?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In fact, our provincial legislation is very clear. Bylaws can be made under the Municipal Government Act to establish, alter, or eliminate wards. I want to say that bylaws must be advertised by the municipality prior to being passed by council. Also, the public can make presentations to council on any bylaws that the city brings before its

council. I also want to say that the Municipal Government Act gives municipalities the autonomy and the flexibility to respond to local priorities.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Provincially when boundaries need to be redrawn, an Electoral Boundaries Commission is struck, which consults with the public and makes recommendations to the Legislative Assembly. Would the minister consider amending the Municipal Government Act to include public consultations in decisions made regarding the redrawing of ward boundaries?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, the Municipal Government Act already ensures that the public is part of the process by advertising the bylaw. Also, council meetings are able to be attended by the public. Again I say that the key principle of the Municipal Government Act is that it gives municipalities the authority to make local decisions.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The public can attend, but they cannot make presentations.

To the same minister: is there a process that the residents of ward 10 can follow to appeal this decision?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, as I stated earlier, Mr. Speaker, there is a process in place. Further to that, individuals can submit a petition to the municipality asking for a vote on any proposed bylaw or plebiscite on any issue.

Councillors are accountable. Elected officials are accountable for the decisions that they make. It is essential that municipalities have the ability to make those decisions that meet the priorities of their citizens.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

2:30

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last summer the government promised funding for carbon capture and storage and also public transit. Obviously, the economic times have changed since then, but while all the funding for carbon capture and storage remains, the funding for public transit has dried up. To the Minister of Transportation: why has the minister failed to advocate for the necessity of funding for public transit?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, Green TRIP, which the Premier announced last July, is going to be the most funding put into public transit in Alberta’s history, and we’re moving ahead with Green TRIP.

Mr. Kang: Mr. Speaker, I’m talking about the same green economy the hon. minister is talking about. Where is the funding for public transit in this budget? We want to see it.

To the minister again: does the minister have a cost-benefit analysis to justify why this government is not as committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions through taking cars off the roads as it is to burying carbon underground?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, that’s exactly what Green TRIP is all

about. I would ask the hon. member to stay tuned until we bring out the budget. We'll know where it's at. We've been consulting. I've met with the mayors of both major cities. We've met with the AAMD and C. We've met with AUMA. I do have to say that the consultation process is taking a little longer than we expected because everybody has a different idea. We're having a little bit of a problem coming to consensus on what we're actually going to have for a program, of what the criteria will be, but I can tell the hon. member that we're working on that criteria, and we're moving ahead.

Mr. Kang: We are talking about \$2 billion dollars that was promised by the Premier, Mr. Speaker.

To the minister again: how will Alberta ever move towards a more sustainable cleaner, greener economy and lifestyle when the government runs away from public transit, which has proven immediately effective, and shelves the technology for reducing greenhouse gas emissions?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, I have to say that one thing he said is right: our Premier did commit \$200 million. I will say that what our Premier says has always happened in this province. I agree that we do want to reduce tailpipe greenhouse gases, as the hon. member was saying, and that's exactly what we're going to do. We do have a bit of a problem here with everybody so keen on wanting to increase their public transit that they're not coming up with the greatest innovative ideas to reduce that greenhouse gas from the tailpipes. That's what we're working on.

Security of Provincial Energy Resources

Mr. Marz: Mr. Speaker, despite the current global economic slowdown Alberta's oil sands will continue to play an important role in Alberta's long-term economic growth and provide a secure energy source for this province, our country, and North America. In order for the oil sands to fulfill these roles, government must ensure that the oil sands are secure and protected. My first question is to the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. What measures are in place to protect Alberta's energy resources such as the oil sands?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government does have a plan in place to protect all critical infrastructure in our province. The Alberta counterterrorism crisis management plan emphasizes the use of intelligence from a range of sources to identify, mitigate, or prevent a security threat before it occurs, and the Alberta Security and Strategic Intelligence Support Team gathers, analyzes, distributes critical intelligent information to industry and law enforcement. Partnership and collaboration between government, industry, and law enforcement is the backbone of our counterterrorism plan.

Mr. Marz: My final question, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister. There have been several pipeline bombings in northwestern British Columbia in the past few months. What assurance can the minister provide that pipelines in Alberta will be protected from attacks such as the ones in B.C.?

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, the Alberta government takes the security of our energy resources very seriously. There is no indication that Alberta Energy infrastructure is at risk, and our threat level remains low. However, we will continue to work with the oil

and gas industry and law enforcement agencies to ensure the security of the industry. Our counterterrorism and crisis management plan is regarded as one of the most comprehensive in the country and is continually reviewed to make sure it meets the stringent requirements of both government and industry.

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

Health Care Privatization

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The situation in Cochrane regarding radiology services is an example of one of the problems with private delivery of health services. If a clinic providing health services can't make a buck in the community, then they are out the door. I'm not necessarily advocating public dollars to bail out failed private businesses. My question would be to the Minister of Health and Wellness. How will the minister ensure that the citizens of Cochrane are not left in the lurch?

Mr. Liepert: Through our universal, publicly funded health care system, Mr. Speaker.

Ms Pastoor: That was the system. I wanted something perhaps a little more specific to the problem that we have at the moment.

Has the minister thought that this situation could apply to communities with private long-term care facilities, which, if they left because they can't make a buck, would leave vulnerable residents at risk?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure what answer the member is looking for. Is she asking me if somehow we can guarantee that a private business will not at some point in time make a business decision? I'm not exactly sure what the essence of the question is. At the end of the day any private business has the ability to determine how they do business.

Ms Pastoor: No, I don't think we should be telling business how to do business. What I want to rely on is that we're not relying on private business to deliver public health care.

Will the minister agree that transportation to Calgary for needed radiology services could be an issue for seniors in Cochrane who may not have family support or, in fact, whose children may themselves be seniors?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member is referring to a situation. You know, I respect the fact that it's a 15-minute drive from Cochrane to the city of Calgary, but I'm not sure what the essence of the question is. Is she asking us to ensure that we have full medical facilities publicly paid for in every community in Alberta? It's unrealistic.

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

Vancouver 2010 Olympics

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation announced an Olympic and Paralympic Secretariat. Just last week a publication celebrating the one-year countdown to the 2010 Olympics was tabled in the House. The publication focused on athletes, artists, and Alberta's facilities such as the Canmore Nordic Centre. My first question is to the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation. What is the status of Alberta's

involvement, and does the minister plan to continue this initiative given the current financial uncertainties?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Ady: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member is right. The Olympics are less than one year away now. I think the country more than ever is going to enjoy being able to watch these Olympics. Here in Alberta we're going to take advantage of these Olympics to showcase our athletes, our culture, and our province. We think it's a very important thing when it comes to tourism and tourism investment.

As well, last week the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit and I were out in British Columbia watching our Olympians perform. They did a fabulous job. As well, we signed an MOU with the province of B.C. about what we're going to do with these facilities after the Olympics and how we're going to use those in the future to inspire new Olympic athletes.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With this significant provincial investment what opportunities will Albertans have to get involved in the Vancouver 2010 Olympics here at home?

Mrs. Ady: Well, another great question, Mr. Speaker. We have nine World Cup events that will be coming to this province in the next year. We're going to be able to see the world come here. We'll almost have, if you will, the pre-Olympics in this province. It gives us a chance to showcase this province to the world, which helps us in tourism.

As well, we're going to have the torch relay coming through this province. I think it goes to some 73 Alberta communities, with 17 of those communities having celebrations where we get to showcase our artists and performers in this province. Some really great opportunities for this province.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit. Why is the province investing in cultural activities at these Olympic Games in B.C. when there are pressing financial issues right here at home?

2:40

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, the reason is that arts and culture is important to Alberta. It's the fabric of our entire province. It shows our diversity; it shows the multidimensional nature of what we are. It's who we are and what we are. The government of Alberta through the Alberta Foundation for the Arts is working with the Vancouver organizing committee to showcase our cultural talent, and all of that money is coming out of existing funding. The events of the Cultural Olympiad will allow people to see the great cultural artists that we have.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 94 questions and responses today.

In 30 seconds from now I'll call upon the first of three remaining members to participate in Members' Statements.

Members' Statements (continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Psychology Month

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. February is national Psychology Month. Throughout the month organizations like the Psychologists' Association of Alberta take the opportunity to let people know what psychology has to offer and the contribution that psychologists make to the overall health of Albertans.

Over 600,000 Albertans, or approximately 20 per cent of the population, will experience a mental illness during their lifetime. When individuals with mental health issues visit a health practitioner, they may only talk about physical complaints like pain, fatigue, and sleep problems; therefore, mental health issues like depression may go unrecognized and untreated. Psychologists can help individuals make good plans and decisions, manage their life more productively, communicate more effectively, and take better care of themselves emotionally. This may help reduce the risk of more serious illnesses.

The government of Alberta is committed to mental health service and has made significant new investment since 2003. Alberta is one of the few jurisdictions with a comprehensive mental health plan, including a children's mental health plan.

The purpose of this month is to raise awareness about the role psychologists play in promoting the well-being of all Albertans. Please join with me in recognizing February as national Psychology Month.

Thank you very much.

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

Jan Hudec

Mr. Webber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to recognize one of Canada's top male downhill skiers, Albertan Jan Hudec. Jan developed his passion for skiing at a young age in the Austrian mountains and then later in the Canadian Rockies when his family emigrated to Alberta in 1986. He exploded onto the world downhill ski scene with a silver medal at the 2007 world championships and followed that up with an historic win at Lake Louise that same year.

A few weekends ago Jan tore the anterior cruciate ligament in his left knee while competing at the world championships in Val d'Isère, France. He has suffered through the same injury to his right knee three other times. Despite this setback he is determined to compete in the Vancouver 2010 Olympics, and he is aiming for a podium finish. His perseverance, courage, and indomitable spirit truly represent what is great about our province and our people. I wish Jan a very speedy recovery and all the best in his quest for Olympic gold in Vancouver.

I would also like to recognize five other Alberta athletes for their medal finishes in various international events last weekend. Canmore's Mike Robertson won a silver in snowboard cross, Spruce Grove's Jennifer Heil a silver in freestyle moguls, Calgarian Kaillie Humphries a silver in women's two-man bobsled, Eckville's Mellisa Hollingsworth gold and bronze in skeleton, and, of course, a few weeks ago Calgarian John Kucera gold in the world championships at Val d'Isère, France, in men's downhill.

Mr. Speaker, I ask members of the Assembly to join me in saluting Jan Hudec and all the other Alberta-based winter athletes who train so hard to achieve their dreams and to make us proud.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, are you participating today? Proceed.

Climate Change

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today is a significant day for Canada as the new President of the United States makes his first official visit. President Obama is steering his country on a dramatically different course than his predecessor. He has recognized the responsibility we all have to the global environment and has already taken action to counter the threat of climate change. He has acted quickly and decisively to create jobs, save homes, and deal with the uncertain economic times that face both our countries.

While George Bush coveted Alberta's oil no matter what the environmental cost, President Obama's environmental adviser said just this morning that Alberta's PR campaign to greenwash the tar sands isn't working in Washington. The tar sands will not be exempted from America's new environmental policy. President Obama knows that the tar sands have a massive carbon footprint, and he knows the United States must reduce its dependency on foreign oil. Our energy industry and the jobs of Alberta workers are in jeopardy.

This House can act quickly and decisively if we decide to. We can use our resource wealth to develop a strong green-energy sector and diversify our economy. We can preserve our wilderness with dry tailings technology and managed, responsible growth. We can create good jobs by refining bitumen here in Alberta and by investing in public health care, public transit, and green infrastructure, or we can continue the policies of the past and be left behind as the world changes.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Calendar of Special Events

The Speaker: Hon. members, as this is the last day the House will sit in the month of February, I think it's important to draw the attention of all members to what other events are planned and are taking place in February so that recognition is appropriately paid to all of them.

February is Heart Month, national Psychology Month, as we've heard today, and, as we've heard earlier this week, Black History Month. It's also Junior Achievement Month. February 1 to 7 was White Cane Week, as it was International Development Week, as it was Eating Disorder Awareness Week, as it was National Therapeutic Recreation Week.

February 2 was World Wetlands Day, as it was Groundhog Day. February 2 to 8 was World Salt Awareness Week. February 4 was World Cancer Day. February 7 to 14 was Congenital Heart Defect Awareness Week culminating in Congenital Heart Defect Awareness Day on February 14.

February 9 was Tu B'Shevat. That's the Jewish Arbour Day. February 9 to 15 was Random Acts of Kindness Week, as it was World Orphan Week. February 11 was Winter Walk Day. February 12 was Sexual and Reproductive Health Awareness Day. February 14, as we all know, was Valentine's Day, but it also was Congenital Heart Defect Awareness Day. February 15 was National Flag of Canada Day, as it was International Childhood Cancer Day.

February 15 to 22 was Scout-Guide Week. February 16 was Heritage Day, as it was Family Day in other parts of the country. February 19 to 22 is the Alberta 55 Plus Winter Games, being held in Lethbridge, which we heard about. February 20 is United Nations World Day of Social Justice. February 21 is International Mother Language Day. February 22 is World Thinking Day.

February 22 to 28 is Freedom to Read Week. February 23 is International Corporate Philanthropy Day. February 24 is Shrove Tuesday. February 25 is Ash Wednesday. February 25 to March 1 is Canadian Landmine Action Week, and February 26 to March 7 is National Engineering & Geoscience Week.

Presenting Petitions

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

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to present a petition to this House today. The petition is of roughly 80 signatures from throughout southwestern Alberta requesting:

We, the undersigned resident of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government to introduce amendments to the Health Professions Act that would recognize marriage and family therapists as a regulated profession [pursuant to this act.]

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Bill 14

Carbon Capture and Storage Funding Act

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 14, the Carbon Capture and Storage Funding Act. This being a money bill, His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, clean energy production and wise energy use are the keys to Alberta's sustained economic prosperity. Passage of this act will authorize the Minister of Energy to expend \$2 billion for a number of large-scale carbon capture and storage projects, ensure that Alberta pursues clean energy production as outlined in the provincial energy strategy, and allow Alberta to exercise its leadership in forwarding the science of CCS as part of the global greenhouse gas emissions solution, a solution endorsed by the G-8, G-20, the United Nations, the European Union, the International Energy Agency, and most recently the President of the United States.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 14 read a first time]

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

2:50

Bill 202

Municipal Government (Municipal Auditor General) Amendment Act, 2009

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 202, the Municipal Government (Municipal Auditor General) Amendment Act, 2009.

The objective of this bill is to create an office of the municipal auditor general under the Ministry of Municipal Affairs. The municipal auditor general would work with Alberta's municipalities to improve business practices and would create a mechanism for Albertans to determine whether they are receiving fair value for their business and property taxes.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 202 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to file a consumer tipsheet on the issue of utility submeters for rental units.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of my colleague the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition I would like to table an open letter from the mayor of Cochrane, Truper McBride, who is registering his community's concerns about the removal of radiology services from Cochrane.

Thank you very much.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a tabling this afternoon that I would like to present to the hon. Members of the Legislative Assembly from the Leader of the Official Opposition, the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View. This is an open letter to members of the Assembly regarding the price of tuition, housing, and textbooks for students.

Thank you.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings. First, I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of some of the images included in an article from the current issue of *National Geographic* titled The Canadian Oil Boom: Scraping Bottom. These images convey the deep environmental scars of the tar sands to the world.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of 10 reports from long-term care workers indicating specific problems on shifts where they were short-staffed. One of these reports shows that although staff missed their breaks, they also had to rush the meals, and they were, again, unable to toilet or put the residents to bed on time.

Projected Government Business

The Speaker: The Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. According to Standing Order 7(6) I would ask the Government House Leader to kindly provide the Assembly with the projected government business for the week commencing March 2, with government business commencing March 3.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to do so and, in fact, would anticipate that on Monday, March 2, after Orders of the Day are called, I will be requesting unanimous consent of the House to allow the minister of finance and the President of the Treasury Board to present messages from His Honour the Lieutenant Governor on motions for supplementary and interim supply and to table the appropriate documents. Of course, with the privilege of the House, we would then table those at the first available opportunity after the end of the third quarter and the requirement that the minister of finance has to make a public report on the finances of the province before the end of February. So the first day that's available to us, we will ask for unanimous consent to table those messages and reports.

That would lead to Tuesday, March 3, on which we would have the opportunity to continue in day 6 of the reply to the Speech from the Throne and second reading of bills on the Order Paper. There are a number of bills on the Order Paper – bills 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10,

11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, and 17 – and we anticipate that bills 2 and 5 would be in Committee of the Whole. Bill 1 may be in third reading or may be in Committee of the Whole. That's a long list of bills, Mr. Speaker, but many of them are fairly short, so we anticipate that we may be able to deal with a number of them on Tuesday.

On Wednesday, March 4, we would anticipate asking the House to go into Committee of Supply on the supplementary estimates.

On Thursday, March 5, in the afternoon we would anticipate asking the House to resolve into Committee of Supply on the interim estimates.

The Speaker: Hon. members, during Oral Question Period today several points of order were raised. We'll deal with the first one. The hon. Government House Leader.

Point of Order

Questions about Legislative Committee Proceedings

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are a number of citations that I could give you, but I think I would start with the citation of 23(1) of our standing orders, which suggests that a member should be called to order if they "introduce any matter in debate that offends the practices and precedents of the Assembly." While technically, I suppose, question period is not debate, I think the context of the rule covers the suggestion, as do the general rules with respect to the privileges of members of the House, that we know that the committees of the House are committees of the Legislature and are not an extension of government. I think that's an extremely important distinction for the privileges of members of the House and for the operation of parliamentary democracy. Now, the fact that there are majorities of one party or another on a committee is not, in my view, relevant to the operation of the committee and the privileges of the committee and the understandings that we need to have about the roles and functions of the committee.

Mr. Speaker, it was very unfortunate, in my view, when the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar rose in the House during question period to raise a question to the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations under the guise that he was asking a question to the Deputy Premier and, as you quite rightly pointed out, inappropriately in terms of asking about a subject matter that he was really asking about in terms of his former role as minister of justice, but you dealt with that.

The question that I want to deal with is a clear admonition to the hon. member who raised the question and a reminder to members of the House that the committee – the formal name of it, I think, is the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices – is a committee of this House and is not a government committee. It's not an extension of government. Each member of that committee attends that committee and participates in that committee as a member of the House and acts as a member of the House in carrying out his duties. So for the hon. member to say that the government last night did something at that committee is absolutely, totally inappropriate and wrong, and he must be admonished, Mr. Speaker. We must make it abundantly clear. I mean, I heard the news reports this morning where the media got it wrong.

I am not a member of that committee. As I understand it, that committee went in camera for discussions. I am not privy to the discussions that that committee had as a member of this House. That role, that oversight for legislative offices has been delegated to that committee. It's the purview of that committee. I'm not privileged to know what discussion happened at that committee. I can make assumptions that members opposite raised at that committee the same objections and concerns they had about the Chief Electoral

Officer and the process of the election that they raised after the election in public quite vociferously. I assume that they were consistent in their representation before the committee, but I'm not privileged to know that.

So for the hon. member to rise in his place and to say that the government did something last night, when he is referring to what was done by a committee of the House with the full responsibility of the House placed upon that committee, is absolutely and totally wrong. Mr. Speaker, he should be asked to retract that remark and apologize to the House.

The Speaker: Anybody else want to participate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I, of course, listened with interest to the hon. Government House Leader in this matter, and it would be my view that there is certainly not a point of order here under 23(1). It would be my duty and my role as a member of the opposition to bring forward at the earliest time a matter in this Assembly.

As a member of the Official Opposition I would refer all hon. members of the House to *Beauchesne* 409 and the roles and duties and the guidelines around question period. Certainly, I would look at 409(4) and explain to the House that this is certainly a very, very important matter. It is not a frivolous matter, and it should be dealt with accordingly.

3:00

I certainly have a right to ask the Premier. I didn't ask the Deputy Premier a question. I directed my questions to the Premier, and it is my understanding of the rules of this House that any member opposite can respond if they so choose.

The hon. Government House Leader said that the proceedings of the Legislative Offices Committee occurred in camera, and he's right about that, but after the committee went back into public discussion, there was a rather lengthy debate by all members of the House regarding this matter. It's on the public record. Comments are already on the public record from each and every member who was in attendance and interested to participate. Now, it's difficult to determine that the committee is not supposed to discuss these matters in the House. I certainly have not heard anything like that in my time here, Mr. Speaker.

I would refer hon. members to the Order Paper for today. There is no notice of motion here from any of the government members, including the Government House Leader, on this matter that was discussed at Legislative Offices last night – and not only discussed, but there was a motion, which I opposed – to seek a search committee to find another Chief Electoral Officer. I'd like to point out that it has to be a government motion that appears on the Order Paper. It's not a motion from an individual member; it's a government motion, as the chairman of the committee, who is present this afternoon, indicated when we were discussing this last night. I don't see that motion on the Order Paper.

I would again state that I have every right to bring this matter forward as soon as possible. Now, I might be wrong, but I see notices on here for government motions 5, 6, 7, and 8, and none of them are dealing with this matter. I think I brought it up in a timely fashion. When it does appear as a government motion, I'm sure there will be more debate on it. For the hon. member to indicate that we don't have the right to bring this forward, I think, is an error.

I can understand where he's coming from, but – I'm sorry – the testimony from Mr. Gibson to the committee is directed to the

government's actions or in some cases their inaction. The government, in my view, is responsible.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Others?

Hon. members, the point of order raised by the Government House Leader particular to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, I believe, had to do particularly with the usage of a certain word and a particular phrase where the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar said: "This morning we learned the government has a financial deficit. Last night we learned, unfortunately, the government has a democratic deficit when they fired the Chief Electoral Officer of this province." I believe in listening attentively that the point of order basically surrounds itself around "the government has a democratic deficit when they fired the Chief Electoral Officer." Précis, bringing it down, that the government fired the Chief Electoral Officer I believe is the crux of the matter of this particular statement. The Government House Leader contends that that was inappropriate language, was wrong, and the chair agrees. It was inappropriate, and it was wrong.

Committees are committees of the Legislative Assembly of the province of Alberta. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar is the long-standing chair of such a committee. Just to bring it to the attention of all chairs of all committees, then, I want to read a paragraph from the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, which is one of the documents we use in the Assembly, on questions concerning matters before committees.

Questions seeking information about the schedule and agenda of committees may be directed to chairs of committees.

And we've permitted that in the past.

Questions to the Ministry or a committee chair concerning the proceedings or work of a committee may not be raised.

And we've dealt with this in the past.

Thus, for example, a question would be disallowed if it dealt with a vote in committee, with the attendance of Members at a committee meeting, or with the content of a committee report. Questions to the Ministry on legislation or on a subject matter that is before a committee, when appropriately cast, are normally permitted as long as the questioning does not interfere with the committee's work or anticipate its report. When a question has been asked about a committee's proceedings, Speakers have encouraged Members to rephrase their questions.

In this case I would suspect that if the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar had used phrases other than that the government did this, then perhaps we would not be having this discussion at this particular point. So it's the utilization of the word. We're bringing it all down to one thing. The committee is a committee of the Legislative Assembly, not a committee of the government. If there's any misunderstanding about this, I suspect that later on this will lead to great discussion. If there's going to be misunderstanding about this, then why have these kinds of committees? But I don't think that's the intent of any of this.

The point is that I believe that this is an appropriate rising on a point of order. The question: the use of "the government" and "they fired." Well, I don't know. First of all, I'm not even going to comment about "fired" because I haven't seen the report yet of the legislative committee. It has not been brought to my attention, and I haven't seen the *Hansard* of it. But it was a committee of the Legislative Assembly of the province of Alberta, not a committee of the government, and that has to be very, very clear. Is that clear to everyone? It was an appropriate point of order raised, dealt with.

We have a second point of order. Hon. Government House Leader and hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, you both rose at the same time. The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Point of Order Clarification

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Allow me to respond to the allegation. I have to say this. When we finished the meeting, when we walked out of the meeting, because no decision was made in that meeting, I came out . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, it's appropriate to have a citation. I gather the hon. member is rising on a point of order dealing with something that affects him personally that would come under Standing Order 23.

Mr. Xiao: Yeah, 23(h).

You know, I said to the reporters in the corridor – they all wanted to ask me the question. I simply said one word, “no,” before I stepped into the elevator. I said it in English, not in Mandarin; I can assure you of that. If that one word caused anybody to misunderstand, I'd like to make an apology. But I will take that as a lesson as a rookie politician. Next time I will say more than one word.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Anyone else choose to participate? The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the hon. member has clearly indicated that the allegation made by I believe it was Edmonton-Gold Bar that a member of the committee breached the in camera nature of the committee and that it was reported in the *Edmonton Journal* – or reported in the media, I guess you said. I don't know if you quoted the *Journal*. That was what prompted both myself and the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung to rise because anybody who read the *Journal* report knows exactly who he was referring to and prompted the hon. member to clarify that he did not intend to comment on what went on before the committee but that he was, rather, saying no to the request for him to comment. I believe that's been clarified.

I think it's very important that people not raise questions to besmirch the reputation or to otherwise impugn the integrity of a member in a nature like that very lightly. Therefore, it would have been appropriate for the hon. member to ascertain the facts before he made the allegation in the House as a side-swipe in a question.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, please proceed.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I don't have the benefit of the Blues, but I'm certain that I just said a government member. I didn't mention the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung or anyone else. In reality, as a member of that committee, for any member to leave the proceedings even before a motion to adjourn from the in camera portion is made is unusual. I've got no control over that. I do know what questions not only this member but other members on all sides of the House were asked following the adjournment of that meeting. I don't think there is a point of order here.

I would like to thank the hon. member for his comments, but I think we've got bills to debate this afternoon, and we should get on with that.

3:10

The Speaker: Hon. members, the chair does have the Blues and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar quote.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's very interesting given that a

government member on that committee announced to the press last Friday, when we initially had a meeting, that the gentleman was going to be fired the following week, and you know that turned out to be true.

Okay. That statement is made. Then all of a sudden there's movement. The chair is listening very attentively. No member is mentioned. There is no name of any member in here. The chair would have no idea who you're talking about unless you read certain newspaper articles. The chair doesn't read any newspapers, so he doesn't have any problems with any of this now. Life is good. Life goes on. There is no controversy in my life.

It says that “. . . we initially had a meeting, that the gentleman was going to be fired.” Well, I have no idea who we're talking about, which gentleman is going to be fired. There may be a lot of flurry out there, but as far as flurry in the views and the eyes and the mind of the chair, it's difficult to see this being a valid point of order when no member has been mentioned. Nothing in here is talking about in camera or not in camera. This all seems to be secondary to another world other than the world we live in here.

I appreciate the clarification. I've now become illuminated with respect to this whole matter. I suspect, however, that there's clarity in the air, and we can move on to Orders of the Day.

Orders of the Day

Consideration of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech

Mr. Johnston moved that an humble address be presented to His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor as follows.

To His Honour the Honourable Norman L. Kwong, CM, AOE, Lieutenant Governor of the province of Alberta:

We, Her Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly, now assembled, beg leave to thank Your Honour for the gracious speech Your Honour has been pleased to address to us at the opening of the present session.

[Adjourned debate February 18: Mrs. Klimchuk]

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to respond to the Speech from the Throne delivered by His Honour the Lieutenant Governor, the legendary Norman L. Kwong. It's a privilege every day to serve the constituents of Edmonton-Glenora as a Member of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta and all of the people of Alberta in my capacity as Minister of Service Alberta.

I would like to take this opportunity to give a special thanks and incredible appreciation to my family, colleagues, and constituents for the opportunity that I have been given in representing the people of Alberta. Even with all of this global economic turmoil, Alberta is well positioned to weather the storm, and the Speech from the Throne displays the opportunities we have in Alberta to weather this storm.

As the Minister of Service Alberta it's my job to support the plan that our Premier has to navigate through these uncertain times by supporting the other government departments and by providing essential services to Albertans. Since becoming Minister of Service Alberta, I've become more and more impressed by the depth and breadth of my ministry, especially the front-line staff who serve Albertans so well each and every day.

Service Alberta is an incredibly diverse ministry that delivers a range of public services that touch the daily lives of Albertans. The staff in the ministry work very hard to help Albertans solve problems, find resources, and get their questions answered. It's vital

work, and it's work that often goes unrecognized or is invisible.

At Service Alberta our ministry is responsible for helping Albertans in a variety of ways. We enforce consumer protection laws. We inform Alberta consumers of their rights and responsibilities through the consumer information branch. In registries we deliver motor vehicle, personal property, vital statistics, corporate registries, land titles, and licensing services. Through the office of the Utilities Consumer Advocate we work with consumers and utilities to help resolve utility billing problems. We assist public bodies with matters related to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. Copies of legislation are provided to Albertans through the Queen's Printer. Our services also enable schools, postsecondary institutions, health care facilities, libraries, and municipalities to connect to the Internet via the Alberta SuperNet.

Service Alberta's services to government include the purchase and contract of goods and services for ministries and other government clients: print, mail, courier, payroll, accounts payable and receivable, telecommunications, and library services. We also manage government-wide record keeping, and we lead the standardization of information and technology services across government.

Some "Did you know?" Last year the ministry answered more than 220,000 calls and e-mails through our consumer contact centre about consumer issues, registries, utilities, and landlord-tenant disputes. We returned more than \$750,000 to Albertans through consumer investigations. We facilitated 18 million registry transactions. We resolved more than 3,600 disputes through consumers and utility companies and 4,300 landlord-tenant disputes; responded to more than 220,000 inquiries about consumer issues, registries, utilities, and landlord-tenant disputes; purchased more than \$400 million of goods; printed almost 28 million documents; and processed and delivered 24.8 million pieces of mail to support all government operations.

Now moving on to my other responsibility, as the MLA for Edmonton-Glenora this past year has been exhilarating, and I have learned a lot about my constituency, my department, and myself. There is a line in the Speech from the Throne that I would like to quote. "It is Alberta's people that make our province unique: people who are dynamic and genuine, optimistic and open-minded, people who share the freedom to create and the spirit to achieve." To me, this is what my constituency is all about and the incredible energy that every person represents.

When I have been out and about in the riding, it is in my capacity as the MLA for Edmonton-Glenora. I'm determined to visit every school in the constituency, and I'm well on my way. I have spoken with brilliant grade 6 students who asked me piercing questions about government and the democratic process, a process we sometimes take for granted in our country, especially when you look around the world and see what many others experience. These grade 6 leaders of tomorrow and future voters certainly inspired me.

I've also had the privilege of meeting with many seniors in my constituency, community leaders, nonprofit groups, and business leaders. Their input and perspectives are invaluable and necessary to assist me in my job as their MLA. Just today the Taoist tai chi group gave a demonstration in the rotunda of the Legislature Building. The Taoist tai chi group and one of their instructors, who happens to be 88 and led the class, is a great example of an organization from Edmonton-Glenora that makes a difference for health and wellness for seniors in the entire Edmonton area.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to just summarize my goals moving forward. I would pledge to continue to be available to the constituents of Edmonton-Glenora and the people of Alberta as Minister of Service Alberta; to listen, respect, and bring back all

issues of concerns, which can be both positive and negative; to advocate vigorously on matters of priority to my constituency; and to best represent the people of Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark is being recognized as the 37th participant in the Speech from the Throne.

Ms Blakeman: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is not available?

The Speaker: Oh, I'm sorry. There has been such a lack of attention to that one recently. Please, hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, start the clock now.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's always an interesting exercise for me to listen to the various responses to the throne speech that are given. I've enjoyed this part of every spring session for the last 13 years. But I'm noticing something new this year, and that is the number of ministers who are using this opportunity to speak. With a few exceptions – and I'm thinking of the President of the Treasury Board, who used his time as a tribute to the Lieutenant Governor – there have been almost a dozen ministers who used this time mostly to lay out their plans and priorities and policies. It strikes me that that is what the throne speech is: a collection of various ministries, their plans, policies, and priorities.

This minister has now done the same thing, talked about Service Alberta. Since this is a new thing that's being done in the House, I'm wondering what the end result of this is. What exactly will her little ad for Service Alberta be used for?

3:20

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, certainly, being the MLA for Edmonton-Glenora and the Minister of Service Alberta, to me it's an obvious opportunity to acknowledge the role of all the employees who support me in my role as minister. I think we all too often forget the front-line workers, the people who are working very hard on my behalf as minister. So part of that is what I wanted to bring forward, and the Speech from the Throne is an opportunity to be flexible, to talk about what's going on, and to pass along, you know, the good work that's going on. That's why to me it's a great opportunity to vision and to talk about what I felt about the Speech from the Throne and, as well, as Minister of Service Alberta.

Ms Blakeman: Fair enough. I'm just interested in the duplication that we have: all of the ministers giving input, one presumes, to the throne speech itself, and then you get sort of an addendum, an added opportunity to get up and take your 15 minutes to talk again about what your ministry is doing. So we get it twice.

I was trying to ask what the end purpose of it was. Will you use it on your website for your ministry or put it out in brochures? What's the end result of how this extra little bit of ad time you get is going to be used in your role as minister?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think, certainly, that there are many ways to pass on information. The thing about communicating, which the hon. member is well aware of, is getting the message out and being able to put something in *Hansard* so individuals can read it, see what's laid out, see the facts. This is a

wonderful opportunity to be able to do this in the House. *Hansard* transcribers work very hard to make sure that what is said in *Hansard* is clearly printed and reflects what is said in the House here. That's what I view this opportunity as.

The Speaker: Others?

Then the 37th speaker now on the Speech from the Throne, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Special thanks to the hon. Lieutenant Governor for his inspirational speech to begin this Second Session of the 27th Legislature. I'm honoured and humbled to reply to the Speech from the Throne.

Mr. Speaker, we live in challenging times, so I would like to talk about hope, realistic hope. Anne Lamott said that "hope begins in the dark, the stubborn hope that if you just show up, and try to do the right thing, the dawn will come. You wait and watch and work: You don't give up." This accurately describes the attitude of the pioneers of this province: people who came from afar for the promise of life and liberty who were greeted by cold winters and harsh winds; traders, trappers, farmers, and homesteaders who braved the elements, settled with their families, and forged new communities; and roughnecks like Vern "Dry Hole" Hunter of Imperial Oil, who had more failures than successes. He looked down more than a hundred empty wells before hitting it big with Leduc No. 1, providing the key to Alberta's petroleum success.

This determination did not vanish with the passing of these pioneers. In fact, it inspired others from around the world to venture to Alberta. Mr. Speaker, I want to share a story about an Alberta family that conquered adversity by working hard and believing in a better tomorrow. The story begins with a young farm girl and her family fleeing as the fabric of her country is torn apart by civil strife. After becoming refugees in their own homeland, her family settled in a remote village and started a new life. She then married, and after the birth of her third son her husband left for Canada to make a better life for his young family. During his seven-year absence she not only raised, educated, and nurtured her children, but she also attended college to further her own education and pursue her dreams.

She dreamed of reuniting her family here on Canadian soil, where she yearned for better opportunities so that her children could carry the baton of her dreams in order to fulfill theirs. No sooner had they arrived than they encountered a shocking reality. The Canadian winter was extremely cold. They had to buy new clothes, learn a new language, incorporate themselves into a new community, and welcome a new son. Her husband worked what seemed like endless hours in the mill, while she and her children spent their summers working long hours in farmers' fields. When all the children were school aged, she sewed clothes in a factory and cleaned hotel rooms in order to make ends meet. Times were tough, but this young family remained hopeful, holding onto the promise that if you work hard and believe in yourself, anything is possible.

Then came the '80s. House prices had fallen. Interest rates were alarmingly high. Jobs were scarce, and if you were lucky enough to have one, the pay was scarcely enough to sustain a family. After her children graduated from high school, they headed to Alberta in the hope of opportunity. They carried with them lessons learned from their parents: a humble and stubborn perseverance to work hard and never give up. Eventually, through education the eldest son became an electrician for the railway, the second a computer technician, and the youngest of the four an engineer. She was relieved to see her children finally settled.

After years of backbreaking hard work her devoted husband and father to her children fell ill. As he clung to life, she and her

children clung to hope. The boys took the lead by loading up the moving trucks and moving the parents to Alberta, where I'm proud to say the father received world-class medical care. Ten years later he survives to watch his eight grandchildren grow, aspire, and dream, a vision he had missed in the formative years of his own children's lives.

Mr. Speaker, this family's journey of obstacles is not uncommon. Rather, it's the story of many Alberta families. In the words of Samuel Smiles, "Hope is the companion of power, and mother of success; for who so hopes strongly has within him the gift of miracles."

Now, once more the world is facing uncertain times. Today mankind flirts with terrorism, wars, a global banking, trade, and economic crisis that some fear will lead to a global recession, maybe even a depression. Hopes, dreams, and lives have changed around the world. The naysayers often play on the people's fears by embracing extremist views. These actions serve only to shackle our spirit to despair and cause divisions.

Mr. Speaker, I plead for a more hopeful approach. Sometimes our world is not a just and fair place. It is our collective responsibility to make it so, to help where we can and to comfort where we cannot. Indeed, the truest test of a people's character is not how they fare during the good times; rather, it is how they react during the tough times.

The kind of discourse and planning Alberta revealed in the Speech from the Throne strikes a fine balance between optimism and pragmatism. Indeed, here in Alberta we have many areas on which to pin our hope. Alberta's debt-free status is unrivaled by any jurisdiction in North America. Despite job losses we have the highest employment rates, the lowest personal and corporate income taxes, and the highest savings in Canada, with which Alberta is on track to implement one of the largest infrastructure projects in the land.

Alberta's enviable position is due in large part to the vastness and diversity of Alberta's resources, the revenue from which we are able to continue to invest in teachers for our schools, staff for our hospitals, roads and bridges for our municipalities. Its productive farms and plentiful fields nourish not only its own people but also many around the globe. Its parks, lakes, and rugged mountains capture the imagination and stimulate recreation and tourism, while its energy and industry sustain a nation. Now more than ever, Mr. Speaker, Albertans need to continue on the path to produce in an efficient and conscientious manner while at the same time promoting responsible environmental stewardship. On the issue of the environment are we doing better? Yes, we are. Can we improve? Yes, we can.

Now, Mr. Speaker, Alberta's most valuable asset is neither its beauty nor its abundant resources; rather, it is its people, people like the pioneers who ventured here, like that young family who came in hopes of realizing their dreams, industrious and motivated people from a variety of backgrounds, all who call Alberta home.

Mr. Speaker, the wealth of Albertans depends on the health of Albertans. We've all heard of the wait times to see a family doctor, for long-term care, for elective surgery and emergency care. Personally, I'm encouraged by the hiring of our new CEO of the Health Services Board. He brings with him a wealth of international experience that will engage the front-line staff, will define what health care actually costs, and improve the efficiency of our acute-care system. We are on par to educate more family doctors, nurses, and other front-line staff than we had yesterday, and with the help of technology they will be able to deliver and improve the quality of care for Albertans. However, the real solution to improving access to quality care lies in engaging Albertans in a conversation to live

happier and healthier lives by not getting sick or injured in the first place. Mr. Speaker, in the past simple measures such as access to clean water and vaccinations were seen as the greatest advances in preventative care.

3:30

There is no doubt that we should be personally responsible for our health. However, we need to translate evidence-based knowledge into policy and action on the street to reduce injury and chronic disease by addressing other factors beyond health care services which have an even greater influence on health, such as lifestyles that lead to stress, inactivity, and overeating, excessive use of tobacco, alcohol, and drugs, which all ultimately lead to poor mental and physical health. Today the World Health Organization estimates that 80 to 90 per cent of all cases of type 2 diabetes could have been prevented through minor lifestyle changes. Today in Alberta we have 150,000 diabetics, and we get 10,000 diabetics every year.

We also need to find ways not only to reduce the need to take expensive drugs but also to improve patient compliance when these drugs are prescribed. With the restructuring of public health and the expanded role of the chief medical officer of health, Alberta is on the right track. We will not see results overnight, but in the years to come our children and seniors will live healthier lives and our health care system will be sustainable.

Mr. Speaker, much of this commitment begins with educating Alberta's adults and children. We have an opportunity to leverage the strength of our education system, to create and attract the best and brightest minds, to harness their abilities, and to allow them to lead us into the future. I am reassured of the commitment of this government to advanced education every time I see the multitude of cranes lining the skyline as I drive past the University of Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to talk about responsibility. In order to sustain our core programs, now more than ever we need to think prudently about our spending so that Albertans get the best services for their tax dollars. We would be naive to suggest that governments have all of the answers to all of the problems all of the time. This is where the NGO sector and the business community play a vital role in our province. Albertans have long embraced the virtues of volunteerism and sense of personal responsibility and collective responsibility not only for themselves but also for their community as we lead the country in volunteer hours and funds donated. Earlier today Melanie Peters and Dean Smith from St. John Ambulance were good examples.

Also, the good people of Edmonton-Meadowlark are prime examples of this. The Westend Seniors Activity Centre helps over 1,300 seniors live independently as they participate in programs so that they can enjoy their golden years. It's driven by the energy of its community members, who volunteer their time and services to the operation of the centre. I invite Albertans to join me and my seniors at the Silver Hair Gala event on April 18.

Similarly, the Kids on Track program in the west end educates young people, especially those from immigrant and low-income families, about leadership, spiritual guidance, and, more importantly, to believe in themselves.

Covenant Health manages the Misericordia community hospital campus, where hundreds of health care workers and volunteers are able to provide quality care for the people of the west end.

We have many fine elementary and junior high schools in addition to Jasper Place and St. Francis Xavier high school which educate the next generation of Albertans.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, for employment, retail, and recreation we need to look no further than the jewel of my constituency, West Edmonton Mall, which provides employment to over 23,000

Albertans and has lured international attention and millions of visitors to this province.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta has always attracted dreamers, people with big ideas, big ambitions, and big plans. All they have required is the proper environment in which to prosper, a place where dreams and preparation meet opportunity. Alberta has been and will continue to be such a place.

Alberta is a place where the third son of the young lady I told you about stands before you today thankful for his parents' sacrifices so that his children may create and achieve their own hopes and dreams. Mr. Speaker, I'm appreciative of every gift that this province has given to me and my family. I'm unwavering in my commitment to Alberta. To the good people of Edmonton-Meadowlark who have placed their trust in me: thank you. To my mom and dad: thank you; I love you both.

Mr. Speaker, in summary, yes, Albertans will face challenging times ahead. The world will face tough times ahead, times our pioneers, my family, and all Albertan families have seen before and have overcome only to see a better tomorrow. The U.S. President, President Obama, is visiting our country. While our neighbours to the south pick themselves up and dust themselves off, in his words, we stand steady with our sleeves rolled up, backs straight, and our heads held high with a firm resolve to take on any challenge that confronts us.

I would like to close with some thoughts from my constituents Murray and Donna Armstrong. When we hope that the present economic recession won't get too bad or won't last too long, we put our hopes outside of ourselves, that a world which seems out of control will somehow not be what it is but will somehow make itself better. Our hope comes from knowing that no matter how scary these times are going to be, we get to choose our response to this scary situation. We choose to stay in gratitude for the love our family has for each other, for puff issues, for having a choice between eating out or staying in, for having the Rocky Mountains so near, and for knowing that of the 6 billion people on this planet we have been given so much. For us hope is not a wish born from fear but comes from knowing that our inner choices keep the blessings we have in our lives bright within us.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. May God bless you. May God bless Alberta. May God bless Canada. May God bless the Queen. Thank you.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, and thank you very much to the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. That was certainly a heartfelt statement, and I'm sure we all appreciate it. But there is something that is fascinating me that I have heard repeatedly. I have never heard so many Conservatives quote and reference a Democrat politician before in my life. I've listened carefully to most of the responses to the throne speech that have happened in the House, and the member himself has just done it again. So please share with us: was it in briefing notes from the Public Affairs Bureau to mention President Obama? I'm fascinated that so many of the members of the government caucus have mentioned or referenced the new President of the United States. Could you share with me why so many of you are referencing him? I'm just fascinated.

The Speaker: The hon. member, if you choose. You don't have to.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, to answer that question: not at all. This speech was written by myself and my assistant, and the lesson here

to learn is that we as elected members are here to solve problems. Whether we reference the President of the U.S. or not reference the President of the U.S., we're here to solve problems for Albertans. It shouldn't be our political affiliations that dictate these problems. One party or one belief system, they don't have the monopoly to quote or not quote anybody. I think the President of the U.S. is a respected man internationally by everybody. He's respected by members of this caucus, and I hope he's respected by members of that caucus as well. But I think the member opposite for asking that question.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question, really, relates to the throne speech and the comments in the throne speech concerning health care and healthy communities and so on. Given the member's position – I think he's parliamentary assistant, if that's correct, on Health – and his own medical background I'd just like him to discuss the issue of staffing for health care, particularly the long-term manpower shortages of nurses. We are in a position in Alberta of having a deliberate strategy of recruiting nursing staff from outside of the country, particularly underdeveloped countries, and I think that's a poor long-term strategy because I just don't think it's right to be recruiting nurses from countries that need them even more than we do. I'm wondering if the member could discuss that issue. It's not actually mentioned in the throne speech. I wish it had been. Is it appropriate for Alberta to have a long-term strategy of recruiting nursing staff from Third World countries?

3:40

The Speaker: The hon. member if you wish.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the hon. member for asking me that question. That's a very good question in fact. In Alberta today we have 1,000 more nurses this year than we had last year. The real solution is education. We are educating more nurses, more LPNs, and more nurse's aides. The solution is not simply more nurses; while we do need more nurses, it is actually to give the nurses support. I work with 600 nurses, and these are highly-qualified people. I see many of the nurses pushing stretchers, cleaning blood off the stretchers, cleaning floors, changing diapers, jobs that they ought not do.

On the immigration issue we do have teams looking for nurses internationally in countries that have a policy where they create an oversupply of nurses. That is their business and immigration policy. The ones that are qualified and have worked in hospitals that have the standards that we have, we bring them into our country. They have an opportunity to help their families back home and in doing so help their local economies.

Mr. Speaker, I'm glad the hon. member asked about those resources because these were the people – initially, when we came to this country, my grandfather came here, he worked here, and he supported his family back home. When it was convenient for the whole family to come here, we were the new Canadians. This is how we get new Canadians.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my sincere honour to rise today in response to the Speech from the

Throne delivered by His Honour the Lieutenant Governor. I believe that the strength of this province stems from the education system we have built together over the years. As His Honour stated, "The freedom to create our own future and achieve our dreams so often rests on the enthusiasm for education." Prior to being elected by the wonderful people of Edmonton-Ellerslie, I taught in this province for 18 years. As such, when it comes to providing the best education for our children, I have seen many initiatives that have worked and many that have not. In the spirit of the discussion we have heard in the past few days, I would like to share some of the recent government initiatives that have given me great hope for the future.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that public involvement is crucial to continually improve Alberta's education system. In order for the education system to truly be successful, it needs to be viewed as successful for everyone involved, from the students and parents to the teachers and administrators. That is why I'm so pleased to see current government initiatives that are focused on public consultations and input from a wide variety of perspectives.

Mr. Speaker, one of these initiatives that is close to my heart is setting the direction for special education in Alberta. I was honoured to be named the chair of the steering committee for this project on July 21, 2008. As many of my colleagues know, setting the direction takes a bold new approach to education, one that creates a transparent system that is accountable for every Alberta student's success. Our task is to examine the foundation of special education in Alberta and look at making systemic changes in order to provide the best environment for education in this province.

Mr. Speaker, our team, which includes the steering committee, a stakeholders working group, and representatives from Alberta Education, recently completed phase 1 of our consultations. We went to 10 towns and cities in Alberta and accepted online and written submissions in order to get the broadest and most complete views on how to improve the education system for our most vulnerable students. In total phase 1 consultation involved input from approximately 4,000 Albertans representing the views of students, parents and guardians, teachers, teacher assistants, school administrators, school authority staff, school board trustees, community support organizations, and health care professionals.

Both as a teacher and a father I have seen and heard many points of view on education. However, there were several issues that had never crossed my mind and never entered into our conversations. This is a perfect example of why I believe in the value of public consultation: to bring perspectives to the forefront and raise awareness of previously unidentified issues.

Alberta Education is also asking for students' perspectives in innovative ways through the Speak Out initiative. Students can log on to the web page for live discussions and blogs and send in 60-second videos of what students themselves feel about the education system. Alberta Education is also travelling to several towns and cities in order to interview students and get their feedback as part of the Speak Out initiative. All of that information will then be collected and analyzed in order to continually make improvements to the already strong education system in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, as His Honour the Lieutenant Governor pointed out in his Speech from the Throne, Alberta Education is currently developing a long-term plan to determine what it means to be an educated Albertan 20 years from now. That plan is called Inspiring Education. This initiative is unique in that it is a dialogue with Albertans, who will bring their own distinctive perspectives to the conversation. Outcomes from both the Speak Out and setting the direction initiatives will be integrated into the dialogue as a new vision for education in the 21st century is crafted.

These are just three examples of government initiatives aimed at improving the education system in this province.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, as His Honour highlighted, innovation is critical to ensuring the continued success of Alberta as a whole. This government's support of postsecondary institutions demonstrates a heartfelt faith in the promise of future generations.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology has also continued with the ambitious registered apprenticeship program. I served as a RAP co-ordinator for J. Percy Page high school for two years before being elected. I can say from experience that this program is a great tool to help train a skilled and educated workforce in Alberta. The program is a way for high school students to become apprentices and earn credits towards an apprenticeship program and a high school diploma at the same time. I think it is very important both to the student and prospective employers to make sure that people are trained before entering the workforce.

These are just a few of many projects that the current government is embarking on to improve the quality of education in Alberta for everyone. I applaud this government's continued commitment to education and stand in the conviction that Alberta will continue to provide the best education system possible in the coming years.

I look forward to the upcoming session and opportunities to engage in debate on these important issues. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciated the enthusiastic support for education in Alberta. I and the entire Liberal caucus are enthusiastic supporters of education as well. In fact, I happen to believe that the key to the future of this province is education, right from prekindergarten to postgraduate.

I agree that there is a good, respectable school system in place in Alberta, and we always need to work to make it better. I wish Alberta's postsecondary institutions ranked more highly, and at some point I would like to see the throne speech make an overt commitment to, for example, the U of A's objective of being one of the top 20 public universities in the world by 2020.

My question to the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie concerns achievement tests, particularly for grade 3s. I would have liked to have seen in the throne speech a commitment to eliminating those. I'm wondering if this member has a perspective on that particular issue, whether he believes that the government should continue to support achievement tests for young children or not.

3:50

The Speaker: The hon. member if you wish.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As a former educator I've always believed in accountability. I've also believed in assessment for learning. As a government and as a former teacher I think having assessment for learning is a wonderful tool. As a government I think we will continue to do what's in the best interest of all Alberta students.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to ask the member, in view of his speech, how he feels about the members across the aisle, who remind me of the two old men in *The Muppet Show*, who scrape the bottom of the barrel to try to find anything negative in the Speech from the Throne and try to show Albertans what a terrible province it is that they live in. How do you feel about that in reference to your speech?

Mr. Bhardwaj: I have no comment on that. Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others who would like to participate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you. I commend the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie for the wisdom of his response to the last question.

I'm actually trying to engage in genuine discussion here, so I'll just return to the issue of achievement testing, particularly in elementary schools. The member was a little bit general in his response. Does he hold the position that achievement tests for younger children are as valid and useful as they are, say, for high school students, which he taught for many years?

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much. In general, depending on the level you're talking about, achievement tests at grade 3 or grade 6 or grade 9 or grade 12, which we are all familiar with, I think serve a purpose. I think it gives the teachers and the parents and the government basically an understanding of where we place ourselves. How are we doing internationally? How are we doing globally? How do we compare ourselves with other provinces? It sets a criteria and gives us the opportunity to really look at ourselves, look at the curriculum itself, look at evaluation strategy, look at, you know, assessment for learning. Of course, I think it's good.

Dr. Taft: Thank you.

The Speaker: Others, if they choose to participate?

Mr. VanderBurg: I'd like to commend the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie for his lifelong achievements in teaching and helping youth. Out in Whitecourt this man made a big difference to a lot of young people, my sons included.

Now that you've had the opportunity to see the difference in the rural system versus the system here in Edmonton, can you tell me about the importance of the industrial arts programs, the programs that you've been so valuable in, and compare rural to Edmonton opportunities?

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I started out teaching in Pincher Creek. Then, of course, I taught in Whitecourt for four years. Recently, as part of my assignment on setting the direction, I had the opportunity to visit a lot of schools. I think we're offering wonderful and excellent programs in our rural schools. Recently I was in St. Paul, I think one of the best programs.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak to the Speech from the Throne. There is no doubt that much has changed in the past year since our last throne speech. However, if economic certainty is our rarest commodity around the world right now, we must still remember that there is much that we can be certain about.

We can be certain about the fact that we are debt free, certain in the fact that we have the lowest overall taxes in the country, certain that we have made the right decision to save. Like one of my constituents recently said to me: you have the good times to save for the bad. Well, Albertans can be pleased that our government had the

foresight to save for days like today. We have \$14 billion set aside in our sustainability fund and our capital account. We can also be certain in the fact that we are a people that will pitch in to help one another. We can be certain in the fact that Albertans will dig in and be bold in re-energizing our province, ensuring that it remains a place where we enjoy a high quality of life, where we have safe communities, respect our seniors, and pave the way for a new culture of innovation to flourish, inspired by the brightest minds in the world.

Mr. Speaker, let me remind us all that our uncertainty is economic. It does not affect the core of who we are as a people. We are a compassionate people. We understand that diversity makes us stronger, that people of different faiths can come together in unity for common pursuits of harmony and opportunity. We are a generous people, generous with our time and generous with our money. There are no limits to our greatness. There are no limits to what Albertans will do to assist one another. There are no limits to what we can achieve collectively.

I'm always so excited to meet with the young families in my constituency. Hearing their dreams and frustrations, alike, inspires me. I'm proud to say that we promised the young families in my constituency and across Alberta to help support the creation of 14,000 new child care spaces in our province by 2011. Mr. Speaker, we are well on our way. More than 5,500 new spaces have been created so far.

The hard-working parents of Calgary-Montrose have produced so many wonderful young people, like Simon, a University of Alberta medical student who I recently met with. Those hard-working families will be pleased that we eliminated health care premiums, which will put nearly a billion dollars in the pockets of Albertans at a time when they need it the most.

The hard-working families of Abbeydale, Applewood, Penbrooke, Marlborough Park, and Monterey Park will also be pleased that the northeast leg of the ring road will soon be complete. They'll be pleased that myself and my counterparts on the east side from city council took the time to meet with our Minister of Transportation to show how important the southeast leg of our road is to the people of east Calgary. Thank you for the thumbs up there, Minister. We understand how much you value the southeast leg of the ring road.

This year, Mr. Speaker, has given me an opportunity to spend more time with my friends in the community of Chateau Estates. They are hard-working people that will be greatly affected by the creation of the new northeast section of the ring road. I'm proud of the fact that I was able to press Alberta Transportation to restart negotiations with landowners around their community to attempt to create a new road between 84th Street and 100th Street. A recent e-mail from a resident of Chateau Estates said: thanks for sticking up for our little community. Well, your little community has a big place in my heart because the people are so driven to common pursuits to ensure that their community is vibrant. I want to take this opportunity to thank the people of Chateau Estates, who have given me so much encouragement and gratitude. I am humbled and proud to be your representative.

Mr. Speaker, I'm a believer that in times of great change it is important to reflect on and perhaps reshape our collective aims and pursuits as a people. The age of pure materialism may be shifting. This may be the time to move our societal focus to innovation, where we as a society move to place more value on resolving our collective problems as opposed to focusing on consuming. Alberta shall be known as a beacon of innovation in the world, where the greatest minds come together to resolve the world's greatest challenges, where our schools are composed of young people learning to be creative and innovative problem solvers, young people that know no limits to their dreams.

4:00

The culture of innovation must be embedded in our societal values. It's a culture that transcends income levels and current levels of education. The culture of innovation involves the greatest minds exploring new frontiers in science and technology. It involves the average Albertan picking up a book and continuously learning and expanding and finding better ways to run their life and better ways to contribute. It encompasses those Albertans with low literacy skills seeking to empower themselves by learning and entering new frontiers for themselves. The culture of innovation should propel our society to great new heights by those cutting-edge new technologies and propel the lives of those struggling to remarkable new levels.

Mr. Speaker, the empowerment of our society's most challenged should be our highest aspiration as a people. I have had the opportunity to visit with some folks that have faced many challenges in their lives. I heard from a man who late in his life embarked on building up his literacy skills. He wrote a piece, a poem almost, on love. He said that you can never tell when love will change your life, and he's right.

I say to all of us that in these times of economic turmoil – some of our friends may be affected more than others – we must ensure that each of us reaches out with our heart to our friends and neighbours. I met a man who was in a dark place when he reached out to better himself through building his literacy skills. He's been clean from using drugs for over a year, and he told me that centimetre by centimetre, newspaper by newspaper, he finally started believing in himself.

These are people that suffered from addictions and now are building literacy skills at the John Howard Society. They're not only recovering but empowering themselves. My message to all Albertans is that just as these individuals reached out and bettered themselves in their darkest hour, we as a collective can better our world during this time of economic uncertainty.

Mr. Speaker, last year I spoke of my commitment to promoting education amongst the young people in my constituency. Well, I set out to visit as many schools as I could in my constituency, and I asked the young people to dream. I asked them to dream their biggest dream. I said that when you feel like your dream is out of reach, you dream some more. When someone tells you that your dream can never come true and that it's outrageous, you dream some more. I said that in the process you also dream of the world you want to see. Don't just dream about your individual life, but dream about the collective. Dream about how you are going to shape our future.

I must confess that after my visits the phone started to ring. Parents would call and say: hey, we heard you speak, and we thought maybe we'd talk to you about the fact that our son or daughter isn't reading at grade level or really doesn't plan on pursuing postsecondary. Or the single mother who said: you know, I've got three; I think two of them are going to pursue it, but I don't think this one is going to finish high school. Mr. Speaker, that was very encouraging for me because it showed that my simple message was getting across.

I hope to continue to bring awareness to new areas such as helping recruit foster parents from various different ethnic backgrounds. A child being taken out of his or her home is perhaps one of the most traumatic experiences in their life. Imagine a young child of 4 or 5 or 6 who's only known one way of life, who's only known one food, who's only known maybe one culture. Imagine that child, first of all, being taken away from their parents and, secondly, being placed in an environment that's absolutely different, an environment that they're not accustomed to. My hope is to help recruit foster parents from various different ethnic backgrounds all over the province to

help make that very difficult situation maybe a little bit better for those young people.

The past year has given me an opportunity to meet so many wonderful people, like Mary, whom I spoke about in this House just a week ago, who would not permit her block to appear to be rundown, so she cut the lawn of her neighbours, who picked up garbage on her street, who went out and personally removed graffiti from her community.

The young guy from G.W. Skene school, who after I spoke came up to me. I remember this vividly. He was wearing a white T-shirt and grey jogging pants. He put out his hand, and he looked at me pretty much eye to eye although I was looking down, and he said: sir, that was very inspiring. I could see in his eyes the fact that this young man had seen more than his years should allow him to see. I could see that he'd seen things that young children probably shouldn't see. I could sense from him that he had this maturity and this wisdom that, to be quite honest, I think we don't represent in this House on many days.

There was a young woman who had just finished high school and said: you know, I don't know what I want to do with my life, so instead of sitting idle, I'm going to contribute. She went to Africa to contribute.

The 80-year-old woman I visited on her birthday looks after her son who, I believe, is in his 50s. This 80-year-old woman looks after her son who's in his 50s because he has a mental disability. She says: he belongs at home with me.

Absolutely remarkable people.

The seniors in my constituency, Mr. Speaker, the people that have spent years building the community and then see it changing in front of their eyes, the seniors in Penbrooke, seven of them on one street, that have lived in the community, they tell me, for over 35 years, and they see it change and change, sometimes not for the best. You know what? They reach out, and they try to do what they can to preserve and to nurture their community.

Mr. Speaker, they're proud of the steps that we've taken as a government in the area of safe communities, and they appreciate the fact that we're working . . . [Mr. Bhullar's speaking time expired]

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

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I thank the Member for Calgary-Montrose for the rather riveting speech. I know this member works very hard and is likely one of the best campaigners I have ever seen.

I recall that when I gave my speech to respond to the throne speech last week, he had a question for me. I also have one for him. I just checked his Facebook a moment ago. A gentleman named Matt Mitschke wrote something. There's reference to the first name of the minister of finance here. It says that this minister is going to post a \$1 billion deficit: I demand that – again, a reference to the name of the Solicitor General – do his job and arrest her; we all know that it is illegal in Alberta to run a deficit; help me out and reinstate some good old-fashioned Chrétien Liberal values to our fiscal insanity. Now, when you talk about Chrétien values, that is synonymous with insanity to me. I'd like to ask the Member for Calgary-Montrose if he could differentiate between, obviously, the values of our Conservative government and that of the provincial and federal Liberal parties.

4:10

Mr. Bhullar: Mr. Speaker, I must confess that my friend and hon. colleague is, indeed, very smooth. You see, the common denominator between my friend Mr. Mitschke and the Chrétien-era Liberal

Party is the fact that they all look for cheap ways of getting attention. So, Mr. Mitschke, if you're listening, you've won. He's got his 15 seconds of fame.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much. I have a question for the hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose. Is the hon. member aware that in the mid-90s the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont was a member of the Saskatchewan Liberal Party and, I believe, a staffer for the leader of the Liberal Party in Saskatchewan, Lynda Haverstock?

Mr. Bhullar: Mr. Speaker, this very discourse we're having right now in the House is again reason for me to state the fact that that young man I met in that elementary school has more maturity and wisdom than we do in this House sometimes. We continuously choose to not rise to the highest common denominator but instead belittle ourselves to the lowest common denominator. The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont is a good man. He's a good friend. The hon. member is a strong MLA with some very strong Conservative policies. I invite you to have a conversation with him about the past because I sure as heck don't want to.

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

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I enjoyed the speech from the Member for Calgary-Montrose, and I think there are some good-news items in there. The ring road – I see the minister is here – that's great. Eliminating health care premiums, which is a very good move, we supported and had encouraged for many years. I did have concerns when he endorsed the throne speech and its claim to having the right strategy for savings because I, as the member probably knows, think that this government does not have the right strategy for savings, and I'd appreciate any comments this member has on the Mintz report.

My biggest comments are around your deep compassion for children and education and the disadvantaged. You will know that I have a strong, strong feeling that we should bring an end to child hunger in this province; there's far too much of it. It's inexcusable that thousands of schoolchildren in Alberta sit at their desks hungry. I'm wondering if the Member for Calgary-Montrose will be championing in his caucus the idea that there be a program supported by the provincial government to end hunger in Alberta's schools.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member would be interested to know that I've actually spent much time with many schools in my constituency asking the very question: do we have children that need breakfast? I identified one, and then we furthered the conversation by saying: who provides this service out there? There was an absolutely wonderful institution called the Boys & Girls Clubs of Calgary, that does an absolutely phenomenal job.

Speaker's Ruling
Referring to a Nonmember

The Speaker: Hon. member, thank you very much. During that last interchange a very interesting thing developed in this Assembly, which to my knowledge has never happened before. The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont gets up and has an electronic device in front of him and quotes an individual's name and also quotes a

message. Now, what transpires if the Speaker's office gets contacted in the next number of days from such an individual saying, "Listen; somebody used my name; the message is incorrect"? What access do I have in order to make a decision? Perhaps we might all think about: do you have to table your BlackBerry? What message is tabled? How do we deal with this? We're going into a new age, hon. members.

The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, take us to the end.

Mr. Prins: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

An Hon. Member: The end is near.

Mr. Prins: The end is near. Correct.

Thank you very much. I am also pleased and honoured to respond to the Speech from the Throne delivered by His Honour the Lieutenant Governor. As we move forward in 2009, Alberta's position will remain strong. This is clearly reflected in the optimistic vision outlined in the throne speech. The throne speech covered a wide cross-section of interests for most Albertans. We have heard many great speeches on various aspects already, so I'll limit my comments to a couple of key issues that are of interest to myself and my constituents in Lacombe-Ponoka as well as the rest of Albertans.

Despite the economic uncertainty currently facing the world, I am encouraged that our government's continued support for fiscal management, market access, and innovative technology will help Alberta forge ahead with confidence. As a former rancher I've had first-hand experience working in the livestock sector. I say former, Mr. Speaker, because in the last week I sold the last of my herd of bison, so this is the first time in probably almost 40 years that I don't own a dog or a cat or a cow or a horse or an elk or a bison or anything else.

While I no longer run a full-time operation, I'm still very involved and connected to the industry through neighbours, friends, and constituents. In addition, my wife and I still live on our farm, where we board animals for other farmers. We board right now bison, cattle, horses, and, at times, elk. I am optimistic for my farm friends that they will continue to thrive in their industries, even though I'm no longer an active livestock farmer. Being a rural MLA, I'm fortunate to be able to hear the feedback about successful initiatives the Alberta government has put forward. Most of the feedback is positive, but it also comes with some critical and constructive suggestions for continued improvement, and this is good.

I was extremely pleased to see that the government is continuing its commitment to implement the Alberta livestock and meat strategy. This strategy is a long-term plan that involves provincial funding, which provides direct and indirect support to livestock producers. Several principles guided the development of this strategy. We want to avoid the creation of market distortions. We want to improve information exchange and market transparency. We want to avoid short-term ad hoc programs.

In addition, we want to reduce unnecessary regulation and bureaucracy and create an environment that allows the industry to be adaptable to changing conditions so that they can be profitable and contribute to rural prosperity. Ultimately, this strategy will help strengthen Alberta's livestock industry and ensure that our agricultural sector is competitive in a global marketplace.

Much of this will be achieved through the creation of the Alberta Livestock and Meat Agency, or ALMA, which is an integral part of the Alberta livestock and meat strategy. This agency will receive provincial funding and will act as a vital link between industry and government. Its role will be to align and redirect government funds, resources, and programs in order to revitalize the livestock sector.

Essentially, the ALMA will act as the catalyst to ensure industry competitiveness, market access, and profitability. It will focus on initiatives that range from creating a shared vision between government and the livestock industry to developing a comprehensive livestock information system that forms the basis of our traceability and age verification efforts, called the Alberta livestock information system, or LISA.

LISA requires livestock producers to provide updated premises identification information and age verification information. This traceability system is essential in ensuring international market access, and some countries already require this type of identification information. In doing so, Alberta will remain competitive not only in traditional markets such as the United States but also in emerging markets such as China, Korea, Japan, and other Pacific Rim countries. Indeed, LISA makes it easier to meet animal and human health requirements both nationally and internationally.

I've also had the opportunity to meet with stakeholders representing key sectors within the livestock industry, and I am encouraged by what I'm hearing. Stakeholders all want the same positive outcomes, but some may have different opinions on how to get there. They're all very aware of the importance of developing a united front to ensure that Alberta producers can maximize their opportunities and enhance the investments made by themselves and our government in the industry. Mr. Speaker, I strongly believe that the livestock and meat strategy, with all its components, will enhance the success of Alberta's livestock industry.

Mr. Speaker, the throne speech also highlighted this government's commitment to investing in developing technology that will help to reduce our environmental footprint. As we all know, Albertans live in one of the most beautiful and healthy natural environments in the world, which is why we need to sustain it not just for ourselves but for future generations as well. It is clear that this government is committed to developing technology that will reduce emissions in order to combat climate change while at the same time enhancing oil production from existing mature oil fields in parts of our province. This will be achieved through carbon capture and storage, or CCS.

4:20

For those who may not know, carbon capture and storage is a process that captures carbon dioxide, or CO₂, emissions and stores them in geological formations deep inside the earth. CO₂ can be captured inside of the gasification vessels, or in the case of many existing plants CO₂ is captured at the flue stack. These specific geological formations where CO₂ is stored are often the same formations that contain oil and gas in Alberta. CO₂ acts as a solvent that is used to flush oil from these formations. These formations may also contain saline water. Experience in Canada and around the world has shown that carbon capture and storage can be done safely while producing positive environmental and economic results.

In fact, the capture and storage of CO₂ is not new to this province, Mr. Speaker. Alberta has been developing carbon capture and storage for well over 25 years, and there are a few examples worth mentioning. One of these is the Alberta Oil Sands Technology and Research Authority, which was an Alberta Crown corporation funded by the Alberta heritage savings trust fund. In 1983 – that's more than 25 years ago – in fact, it provided funding towards Alberta's first experimental pilot project that captured, injected, and stored CO₂ for enhanced oil recovery.

In 1984 the NOVA Chemicals plant in Joffre, which is located in my constituency, started to supply Penn West Energy Trust with captured CO₂ for an enhanced oil recovery project.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, in 2005 both NOVA Chemicals and Dow Chemical, which is located in Prentiss, just southeast of Lacombe,

reached an agreement to capture CO₂ from their petrochemical plants and transport it by pipeline to Glencoe Resources, near Ponoka, for storage in their oil fields. This should increase production from their mature fields and add millions of barrels of oil to their long-term production targets.

These are a few examples of carbon capture and storage projects that have been successful. It is a positive sign for Alberta's future. Ultimately, carbon capture and storage will diversify our economy and provide substantial reductions of CO₂ emissions and add hundreds of millions of barrels to our inventory of producible or recoverable oil in Alberta.

Moreover, the Alberta government has gone one huge step further to ensure that this province is environmentally green. This very afternoon the hon. Minister of Energy introduced Bill 14, the Carbon Capture and Storage Funding Act. This act is groundbreaking because funding for a number of projects will be announced in the future, resulting in greenhouse gas emission reductions of millions of tonnes annually in Alberta. There are already plans by private corporations that specialize in CO₂ sequestration and secondary and tertiary enhanced oil recovery.

At an open house in Fort Saskatchewan some months ago a company announced that they plan to build a major CO₂ pipeline system in central Alberta that will take CO₂ from large producers and transport it to oil fields that can store it and use it to enhance their oil production. This project has the potential to pick up CO₂ from existing plants as well as future plants that may be gasifying coal and upgrading bitumen as well.

Mr. Speaker, exciting new proposals such as these are further proof that industry and the environment can exist simultaneously to the benefit of all Albertans. Ultimately, carbon capture and storage will help lead this province into the 21st century as energy-producing and environmental leaders. I look forward to working with my colleagues to ensure that bright future for all Albertans.

Thank you very much.

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

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to start off once again with something positive. I can see that the President of the Treasury Board is thrilled. I hope I'm correct in this, Member for Lacombe-Ponoka. I believe that Bles-Wold yogourt is produced in that constituency. I am proud to say that in my refrigerator right now there are some large containers of that yogourt. I recommend it to anybody who likes yogourt. I will add that I try whenever possible to buy it at Sunterra Food, which is a local success story. The best value is the largest container, which I think is actually four litres. It's quite a lot of yogourt, but it's great yogourt, great value, a great success story out of central Alberta. So there you go. Good news.

I have a question for the member since he spoke at length about agriculture. I wasn't sure if I heard any reference to elk farming or not. I did hear bison and cattle. I have a question. This didn't appear in the throne speech, but elk farming for years has been, from everything I know about it, pretty marginal, and there are serious and growing concerns, which were flagged years ago, about elk farming being a vector for chronic wasting disease. I'm wondering if the member has any thoughts on the future of elk farming in Alberta. I think there are, in fact, elk farms in his constituency.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to comment on that. Like I said, I have an elk farm right now. I'm a licensed elk producer although I have no elk on my farm at this point in time, so I'm not actively doing this.

In terms of the CWD problem there was one elk in Alberta in 2002 that was found to have CWD. Since that date all heads of all elk slaughtered or that have died from other reasons on elk farms: every one of these heads have been tested. To date about 45,000 heads of both elk and deer on farms have been tested, and there were two deer and the one elk found in 2002. Since then no more elk or deer have been found with CWD in Alberta.

Now, I know that there are people out there that would like to blame the cervid industry for CWD. There is no use blaming somebody for the past. That would be like blaming somebody that had the flu for the flu epidemic. You don't blame the past; you work toward the future.

In Alberta today we are free of CWD within domestic herds. We continue to test in areas of the province where they have CWD in wild herds. The wild herd CWD actually threatens some elk farms. There are probably about 30 to 35 elk farms that can no longer export into other jurisdictions because they are near the area where there are CWD cases in the wild. So to blame the elk ranches for a problem that's actually a natural problem – it has been known in the States and other jurisdictions for many, many years – is completely wrong.

I would want to encourage people to get informed, find out what's going on, and support our farmers out there that are trying to make an honest living and developing rural Alberta with a wonderful new opportunity in the elk ranching business. You know, they can grow elk on a patch of bush that you couldn't raise a cow or a beef cow or anything else. Elk can live out there and actually produce a good living for rural families. I think it's just a wonderful way to develop all the resources that we have out there in rural Alberta. I hope that answers your question.

Dr. Taft: That was a good response. I didn't appreciate that the member had such a strong personal background in the industry.

My other question is also related to agriculture. Over the last 25 years or so there has been a real narrowing down of the choice that beef producers have in terms of slaughterhouses and meat packers. I know that my father-in-law 25 years ago or so could bring a load of cattle to Edmonton, and he could shop around at the stockyards, Gainers and Swift and Burns and two or three other places like that, and there was a real market. Of course, that's gone now. Does this member see any hope for a genuine diversifying of the meat-packing industry in Alberta?

The Speaker: I'm afraid, hon. members, we must move on.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In light of the hour I move that we adjourn until 1:30 p.m. on March 2.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 4:29 p.m. to Monday, March 2, at 1:30 p.m.]

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

Activity to February 19, 2009

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

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

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

1 Employment Standards (Reservist Leave) Amendment Act, 2009 (Stelmach)

First Reading -- 6 (Feb. 10 aft.)
Second Reading -- 90-93 (Feb. 17 aft., passed)

2 Lobbyists Amendment Act, 2009 (Redford)

First Reading -- 9 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 93-94 (Feb. 17 aft.), 121-23 (Feb. 18 aft., adjourned)

3 Credit Union Amendment Act, 2009 (Berger)

First Reading -- 17 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 123-24 (Feb. 18 aft., adjourned)

4 Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2009 (Bhullar)

First Reading -- 17 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 124 (Feb. 18 aft., adjourned)

5 Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2009 (Griffiths)

First Reading -- 17 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 125 (Feb. 18 aft., adjourned)

6 Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Amendment Act, 2009 (Forsyth)

First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft.)

7 Public Health Amendment Act, 2009 (Liepert)

First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft.)

8 Feeder Associations Guarantee Act (\$) (Groeneveld)

First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft.)

9 Government Organization Amendment Act, 2009 (Campbell)

First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft.)

10 Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act (Dallas)

First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft.)

11 Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2009 (VanderBurg)

First Reading -- 19 (Feb. 11 aft.)

12 Surface Rights Amendment Act, 2009 (Berger)

First Reading -- 19 (Feb. 11 aft.)

13 Justice of the Peace Amendment Act, 2009 (Redford)

First Reading -- 19 (Feb. 11 aft.)

14 Carbon Capture and Storage Funding Act (\$) (Knight)

First Reading -- 138 (Feb. 19 aft.)

- 15 Dunvegan Hydro Development Act (Oberle)**
First Reading -- 105-06 (Feb. 18 aft.)
- 16 Peace Officer Amendment Act, 2009 (Lindsay)**
First Reading -- 106 (Feb. 18 aft.)
- 17 Securities Amendment Act, 2009 (Fawcett)**
First Reading -- 106 (Feb. 18 aft.)
- 201 Traffic Safety (Vehicles with Unlawfully Possessed Firearms) Amendment Act, 2009 (Hehr)**
First Reading -- 106 (Feb. 18 aft.)
- 202 Municipal Government (Municipal Auditor General) Amendment Act, 2009 (Johnston)**
First Reading -- 138 (Feb. 19 aft.)

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