



Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature  
Third Session

# Alberta Hansard

Wednesday, February 10, 2010

Issue 4

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

**Legislative Assembly of Alberta**  
**The 27th Legislature**  
 Third Session

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## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, February 10, 2010

[The Speaker in the chair]

### Prayers

**The Speaker:** Good afternoon and welcome.

Let us pray. Author of all wisdom, knowledge, and understanding, we ask for guidance in order that truth and justice may prevail in all of our judgments. Amen.

Please be seated.

### Introduction of Guests

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

**Ms Evans:** I have the introduction of the Lakeland Ridge public school, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Yes. You've been recognized.

**Ms Evans:** Thrilled – thank you – especially since our Premier was the one who first envisioned that this school could be an ideal partnership between Catholic, public, and the two government departments that exist in the school. Well, today we have the privilege of hosting two classes, and I haven't seen them here yet, so I trust that they may be behind us. Oh, there they are. We've got 55 visitors from Lakeland Ridge public school accompanied by Lindy Mair, Jay Robertson, Savi Kajan, Sasha Robinson, Heather Wilton, Lorie Fisher, Leeann Fries, Debbie Borody, and Jenny Stober. These students are very buoyant, and we had a wonderful discussion while we took their picture. I'd ask them to please stand, and we will give them the recognition they richly deserve.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Little Bow.

**Mr. McFarland:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a couple of guests that are constituents from Little Bow. Mr. Kim Craig is the mayor from the town of Coaldale, and Mr. Leo Ludwig is the town manager. Mr. Ludwig actually attended the same high school as our colleague from Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview maybe a year or two ago. I would like them to rise – I see they're up – and receive the traditional warm welcome. They're here to receive some meetings with the AUMA, and they met this morning with our Minister of Environment.

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

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Dr. Trevor Theman, registrar of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta, and Ms Marian Stuffco, the government relations adviser at the College of Physicians and Surgeons. Dr. Theman assumed the position of registrar in 2005 and continues to be very interested in the role that health care professionals can play in creating a culture of safety, while Ms Stuffco, as you may know, has an extensive background in sports at the local, national, and international levels. I see they've risen. I would just ask all of our colleagues in the Assembly to greet them with a warm, thunderous round of applause.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development.

**Mr. Knight:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's certainly a pleasure for me to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly three staff from the Department of Sustainable Resource Development. They are Alberta wildfire operations team members, instrumental in forest firefighting efforts here and in British Columbia last year. Rick Moore, wildfire operations officer in Rocky Mountain House, with 27 years of service, led efforts to fight the 3,000 hectare Brookmere fire near Merritt, B.C. Doug Smith, the wildfire operations officer in Whitecourt, with 25 years of service, was an incident commander in British Columbia involved in multiple fires near Bella Coola. Mr. John Brewer, director of wildlife operations at the provincial forest fires centre in Edmonton, 33 years of service, co-ordinated help in British Columbia to ensure that Alberta remained well protected from wildfires in the province last year. I would ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly and would thank them for joining us today.

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

**Mr. Bhardwaj:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to rise today and introduce to you and through you a visitor from Ludhiana, India, Mr. Gajjan Singh Thind. Mr. Thind is a director of M.G.M. public school Ludhiana. I hope he is enjoying his visit to the capital city of Edmonton in the wonderful province of Alberta. Mr. Thind is joined here today by Gurbhalinder Singh Sandhu, chief editor of the *Des Pardes Times*, Vattandeep Singh Grewal, and Roop Brar. At this time I would ask all of my guests to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

**Mr. Doerksen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure for me to introduce two guests from my constituency: the mayor of Strathmore, Mr. George Lattery, and the CEO of the town of Strathmore, Dr. Dwight Stanford. They attended meetings with ministers this morning and are in Edmonton to attend AUMA meetings later today and tomorrow. Welcome, and I would ask all of my colleagues to extend the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a great honour for me today to rise and introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly several individuals in the public gallery that are here today to show their concern for the mismanagement of our health care system. Please rise as I say your name and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly: Jayne Hamilton, Elaine and Neil Fleming, Tom and Bev Sawyer. Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

**Dr. Sherman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly six bright young students. They are from the University of Alberta Conservative Association. They have interests in political science, sociology, teaching, business. I would like them to stand up in order of their names: Mr. Kevin Tam, who is the president; Mr. Adam

Risling, executive vice-president; Miss Heather Mickalyk, vice-president of events; Mr. Christian Lowden; Mr. Matthew Sztym; Mr. Patrick Ross. This is a bright young future. They are here to keep an eye on us, learn from us, and maybe teach us and guide us in the near future. I look forward to seeing them maybe one day sitting in our chairs. I would like all my friends to give them a warm welcome to the Assembly. Thank you.

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

**Mr. Bhardwaj:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour to rise again today and introduce to you and through you students from Meyonohk elementary school, from my constituency of Edmonton-Ellerslie, sitting in the members' gallery. I would ask the students to please rise along with their teacher, Mrs. Sylvester, to receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

### Members' Statements

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

#### Tribute to Forest Firefighters

**Mr. Johnston:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak about wildfires and the heroic work done by a select group of Albertans who protect the lives and properties of their friends and neighbours from forest fires. It may seem strange to speak of wildfires in February, when sub-zero temperatures are common and snow covers the ground across much of our province. However, the conditions that support wildfires will arrive very soon in Alberta – the season typically begins April 1, less than two months from now – and we will once again have cause to be thankful for the efforts of the firefighters who protect public safety in our province.

These brave men and women put their lives at stake every day of the wildfire season in Alberta to ensure that Alberta communities are protected when danger threatens, and it's not just Albertans that they protect. Last August 290 of our brave firefighters were sent from Alberta to British Columbia to help with the terrible situation facing our neighbours to the west. B.C. was experiencing extreme fire hazards and catastrophic fires burning across that province. Fires encroached on many communities, placing lives at risk and threatening to destroy homes and businesses. Alberta's firefighters stepped up to the challenge and helped British Columbia overcome the dangerous situation.

What is also notable about the effort is that Alberta was able to provide help without compromising safety in this province. Last summer also saw extreme fire hazards in Alberta. Last year we recorded 1,000 wildfires by mid-June, the earliest date we've ever reached that number. Luckily for us and British Columbia, our wildfire hazard lessened as the summer progressed, allowing us to assist British Columbia when they most needed our help.

This scenario illustrates the value of the firefighting agreements Alberta has in place with other agencies across North America, allowing for sharing of resources when one jurisdiction or another faces extreme conditions. Alberta has benefited from this agreement in the past, most recently last June, when 200 firefighters from across Canada and Mexico arrived to assist Alberta with a rash of wildfires.

**1:40**

Wildland firefighters are a rare breed indeed. They are quick to stand in the front lines to fight fires at home and to travel to other jurisdictions to help neighbours in need. I want to express my sincere gratitude to all of the wildland firefighters who protect

people and property in this province, whether they are part of Alberta's firefighting corps or personnel from other . . . [Mr. Johnston's speaking time expired]

**The Speaker:** Thank you very much.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose.

#### Haiti Relief Effort

**Mr. Bhullar:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to pay tribute to many organizations that have come together in support of the people of Haiti. It's estimated that 230,000 people have been identified as deceased and that approximately 300,000 have been injured. However, through this darkness we have brought out characteristics of humanity that really encompass the best of us: charity, compassion, and the spirit to persevere.

To this end, I would like to bring to the attention of the House some of the hard work done by organizations with whom I've dealt over the last few weeks. Two of my constituents, Kamila and Bong, recently hosted a Haiti ARISE concert that brought together many churches in east Calgary, including Christ is Coming Church, Calgary Mosaic Church, Eastside City Church, U-Turn project ministries, Centre Street Church, Peace Chapel Church, Rockpointe Church, and the Way Christian Mission.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, the Calgary Sikh community and the Dashmesh Culture Center as well as Radio SurSangam and radio Sabrang have raised approximately \$25,000 for the Red Cross. My friends here in Edmonton, the Sikh youth of Edmonton, recently held a fundraiser for an organization called United Sikhs that has medical professionals on the ground in Haiti. I believe they raised approximately \$10,000.

This earthquake shook not only the lives of those in Haiti but also the lives of many here in Alberta. Mr. Speaker, I would like to invite all members to join with me and show their appreciation for the fundraising efforts of these organizations as well as ones in their own communities.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

#### Good Neighbour Award

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I love living in Edmonton, and most of that is because of the spirit of Edmontonians. We participate. We volunteer officially and sometimes unofficially by just helping out a neighbour, a friend, even a stranger.

One of the projects currently being sponsored by the city of Edmonton is the good neighbour award, now in its third year. This award is to recognize some of the thousands of people who take positive actions to make Edmonton safer, better, more fun. This award is special for me this year because it is particularly encouraging people who live in multifamily buildings, like apartments and condos, as well as business owners and the not-for-profit agencies to consider nominating someone. Of course, the fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre is home to a lot of people who live in apartments and condominiums.

The short stories and nominations received for the award in 2008 and 2009 were all inspiring and have confirmed a belief that it is the little everyday things neighbours do, those small gestures to assist each other, that make our city safe and livable. The city put the stories together in a lovely booklet called Looking Out for Each Other.

This whole venture is supported by the Realtors Association of Edmonton in conjunction with the city of Edmonton. Thank you to

the Realtors Association of Edmonton for being very good neighbours and for supporting good neighbours. Nomination forms are available at all libraries or online at [www.edmonton.ca/safeedmonton](http://www.edmonton.ca/safeedmonton). And hurry, because the deadline is the 1st of March. I encourage all of our Edmonton MLAs and all of those living in our fair city to consider nominating their own good neighbour.

Thank you very much.

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

#### **Terry Fox Run Commemorative Quilt**

**Mr. Jacobs:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a privilege to rise today and recognize the town of Taber's inspirational ongoing commitment to the Terry Fox Run. Every year the citizens of this compassionate community make an extraordinary effort to raise money in the fight against cancer. In 2008 this community of roughly 7,500 people broke records by raising nearly \$51,000 over the course of the Terry Fox Run with help thanks to extra events, including head shave promotions and a stop by the Taber Tour of Hope.

Last November the one-of-a-kind Terry Fox legacy quilt was unveiled in the Taber public library. This incredible quilt is made from T-shirts from every single Terry Fox Run in Canada, including the province of New Brunswick. To collect these shirts, every Terry Fox Run co-ordinator in Canada was contacted about donating a shirt. Once collected, the quilt was assembled by the Taber Cotton Pickers Quilt Club, while Kaye's Kwikting then completed the outside of the quilt. Now Taber's focus turns to its 2010 run, which hopes to be as successful as in past years.

Mr. Speaker, may I congratulate the citizens of Taber for their extraordinary efforts in the fight against cancer. I know that this beautiful and unique quilt will serve as an inspiration to current and future participants in the Terry Fox Run.

Thank you very much.

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

#### **Darrell Cook**

**Mr. Fawcett:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to rise in the House today and recognize the passing of a great Albertan, Mr. Darrell Cook. Darrell's passing was brought to the attention of this House yesterday, and while we're all saddened by this, I was most disappointed by the nature in which his passing was mentioned.

Darrell was a great Albertan in many ways, upholding the intrinsic values of what it means to be Albertan. He was hard working, entrepreneurial, compassionate, and giving. Darrell was president and chief executive officer of Gibraltar Mortgage. He was committed to business, earning his CGA designation in 1977, and was director of Mainstreet Equity and Canex Energy. But this is not what Darrell will be remembered for. Darrell's life was focused on serving his community and, more specifically, those that are most vulnerable in our community. He was steadfast and deliberate in ensuring that those with disabilities enjoyed the highest quality of life. He had an active leadership role in developing the Road Ahead Society, which was established in December 2000 in response to the needs of families with disabled children and adults.

He was also involved with Calgary's Family Managed Resource Centre as well as being involved in Family Voices Calgary and their Calgary Family Summit, which enables parents and family members to connect with each other. He was a contributor to many charities, a major donor to the Alberta Association for Community Living.

Darrell was instrumental in lobbying the Alberta government to implement the registered disability savings plan in a manner that

maximally benefited people with disabilities and their families. Darrell and his wife, Sheilagh, were awarded the Colonel Eric Cormack and Dr. Barbara Cormack memorial award for their long-term voluntary commitment to families and their leadership in the development of new and innovative community initiatives. In addition to this, he was a board member and current president of the Calgary-Varsity PC Association and an active member of the Calgary Winter Club and the Country Hills Golf Club.

On behalf of the members of this Assembly I wish to express our condolences to the Cook family for their loss, a loss that will be felt throughout the province.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

#### **Provincial Fiscal Policies**

**Mr. Anderson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, Alberta once set the standard for sound fiscal management and responsibility both nationally and internationally. Sadly, those days are long gone. Over the past several years almost no provincial or state government has raised their spending as much or as fast as this one. They have scrapped our no-deficit laws and plunged us back into debt, showing great disrespect to all the Albertans who sacrificed so much, even their own jobs in some cases, to achieve a debt-free Alberta for ourselves and for our children, and things are only getting worse.

In Budget 2010 this government claims an expected deficit shortfall of roughly \$4.7 billion. This number is brutal on its own, but it actually underestimates the true cash deficit this government is running. You see, the \$4.7 billion deficit number does not include an additional \$2.8 billion in infrastructure spending that is offset on the government's books as an asset, as stated on page 18 of their 2010 fiscal plan document. This is still cash going out. It's just, essentially, hidden from public view. Taken together, the total cash deficit for this government is a staggering \$7.5 billion. Added together with Budget 2009's cash deficit, that brings the total to – and I'm glad to see you're sitting down, Mr. Speaker – \$15 billion of red ink in just two years of work.

1:50

So how is this government paying for this? Partly by draining our shrinking sustainability fund, down from \$17 billion just two years ago to \$8 billion this year, and partly through debt financing, which is estimated to climb to \$6 billion by 2012. Mr. Speaker, this PC government has failed Albertans. They have totally mismanaged this province's finances, and they are now heaping billions in debt and unsustainable spending on the backs of young Albertans. This government must be held accountable for this train wreck.

#### **Oral Question Period**

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

#### **Provincial Budget**

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Another budget full of spending without any sense of the value we're getting for our money. While cuts weren't drastic, how do we know the dollars we're spending are getting the job done? To the Premier. Spending more money doesn't mean spending more wisely. How will Albertans know they're getting value from the increased spending money this government is throwing at our problems?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, all of the spending is scrutinized by the Auditor General. He looks at all of the departments and many of the agencies that deliver services like Alberta Health Services and other

publicly funded agencies. That is the role of the Auditor General, and he has done a good job.

**Dr. Swann:** This government is making a bet on commodity prices, that are risky to forecast. How can the Premier take a gamble with Alberta's future by spending money that isn't actually out of the ground yet?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, I believe in Alberta. I believe in the entrepreneurial spirit of this great province. There are signs of economic recovery, but I can tell you that that does not mean that we put our heads in the sand and hope this all goes by without any major repercussions. There are huge global shifts. We've got to get into the marketplace. There's huge competition for people, huge competition for investment. We just can't sit around and wait for a brighter day. We've got to take action, and we have through this plan. We will have a balanced budget by 2012-13.

**Dr. Swann:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I believe in responsible fiscal management. Just weeks ago this government claimed that the buffet was closed. We're not so sure. What specific changes are you putting in place that address, Mr. Premier, value for money rather than simply the amount of money?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that in infrastructure we're getting tremendous value. We're seeing tenders drop by 20, 30, and in some cases as much as 40 per cent. Over a third of that money on infrastructure will be spent by municipalities, so we'll be able to redo all of the old waterlines, sewer lines, build new roads, build schools, build hospitals for future generations. That is money well spent, and that's just one part of the overall budget.

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

### Health Care Budget

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Two days ago every Albertan knew that we were not receiving value for money in our health care system. Alberta Health Services' and this government's management of the health care system is a mess. Albertans also know that the only way to get better value for money is to use the money more effectively. To the Premier: what have you changed in the last two days that will mean Albertans will get better value for the extra \$1.7 billion in the health care system?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, it was clear that by amalgamating all of the boards down to one, the Alberta Health Services Board, we saved about \$600 million in administration. There was still \$800 million that was a deficit within the health system. That gave us a better appreciation of the true cost of delivering health care in this province. There is no jurisdiction – no jurisdiction – in Canada that has given any health service authority five-year funding, increased funding over those years. Our population will be increasing; it'll be aging. We know that there will be more requirement of health services delivered. Now the board can plan successfully and deliver those services that Albertans require.

**Dr. Swann:** We're talking about value for money, Mr. Speaker. It may be a political fix to throw another \$1.7 billion at health care, but a practical fix means Albertans have access to a family doctor. To the Premier: specifically, how many more family doctors will Albertans have access to with this increase?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, we are maintaining our plan in advanced education to keep increasing the number of seats. We will be graduating more homegrown physicians in the province of Alberta. We will meet our target, and that also goes to complement all of the other health care providers – nurses, physiotherapists, the whole broad range of health care providers – that we will need in the future.

**Dr. Swann:** Under this government's incompetent management the deficits of the health authorities have increased year by year: \$68 million, \$297 million, then \$343 million, and now a projected \$759 million deficit. Is this not clear evidence that Alberta health care's main problem is mismanagement?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, we know now the true cost of delivering health care. We wrote off the deficit because that deficit is really part of the overall balance sheet of the province of Alberta. We're starting fresh; we're starting clean. We're starting with a good plan. The minister will be consulting further this year with Albertans in terms of having our own Alberta health care act, that will enshrine the five principles of the Canada Health Act, and also listening to Albertans in terms of what else they would like to see. I believe that we are blazing the trail here in a good health system, improving it, and most importantly it will remain publicly funded.

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

### Provincial Budget (continued)

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier is determined to drain our precious savings account down to zero before the next provincial election. Yesterday's budget turned the multibillion-dollar sustainability fund into this government's personal re-election fund. [interjections] Oh yeah, laugh. To the Premier. If the commodity prices go down, not up, the fund won't last until the next election. What will you do then?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, through good, solid, prudent financial planning we're going to be in the best economic position of any province in Canada. In fact, we're going to lead this nation out of the recession. I have, as I said earlier, great faith in the economy of this province and in recovery, and we will show by 2012-13 a balanced budget, money being put back in the sustainability fund to make sure that we're prepared for the next economic downturn, whenever that may come.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Mr. Speaker, to the Premier: before the hon. Premier drains the sustainability fund, why not reduce the size of your bloated cabinet and save millions and millions of dollars that can be used for children in need and those that are unemployed who need help?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, if I remember, using your calculation, I think the whole Legislative Assembly, this whole operation – all the members here, all of the benefits paid to members, the cost of running offices – is about .1 per cent of the total operating budget. There are savings. We cut about 8.6 per cent out of Executive Council. There will be more savings coming out of the operations of this government.

Let's not fool ourselves. This is the worst economic recession since, well, the 1930s. Many economists are saying that. We have seen oil go from \$75 to \$147 down to \$35. There is no jurisdiction in Canada that has a \$17 billion surplus cash fund, especially for this

kind of opportunity to cushion the blow on revenue and keep our services going.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Mr. Speaker, that was quite an interesting response.

I have a press release dated December 15, 2006, when the hon. Premier reduced the size of his first cabinet from 24 to 18. This is what the Premier stated: "The people of this province told me they wanted more effective government, not more of it." What changed since then other than the fact that we now have a \$4.7 billion deficit as a result of you and your government's mismanagement?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Since 2006 considerably fewer Liberals on the other side.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

### Provincial Deficit

**Mr. Anderson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Monday the President of the Treasury Board suggested that I lacked math skills because of my outrageous claim that the actual budget deficits in 2009 and likely in 2010 would understate the true cash deficit by about \$3 billion. Now, this is puzzling to me because on the bottom of page 18 of their document, Budget 2010, in very small print it clearly states that capital investment is not reported as an expense. To the Treasury Board President: is the roughly \$3 billion in capital investment included in the government's final \$4.7 billion deficit number or isn't it?

2:00

**Mr. Snelgrove:** Sometimes people prove themselves correct.

Mr. Speaker, there are two kinds of capital investment. There are capital grants that we give to municipalities, to health authorities, to schools. Those aren't our assets; they're theirs. That's listed in line 3 on page 67 of the book very clearly. Further down it shows capital investment in government-owned properties, \$2.8 billion, roughly. That is accounted through amortization, which is clearly spelled out on page 78 and again on the bottom of page 79, and it is the most basic of accounting standards to follow.

**Mr. Anderson:** Wow. That is good spin. Your own Treasury Board accountants explained this to me personally. Are their math skills in question as well?

Mr. Speaker, it is clear despite the verbal jiu-jitsu from the President of the Treasury Board that the real cash deficit for Budget 2010 is \$7.5 billion. This number is staggering. To the Premier: will he admit to Albertans that the true deficit is \$7.5 billion so that we can have an open and honest discussion in this House on how to get our spending under control?

**The Speaker:** Who is answering this?

**Mr. Snelgrove:** Mr. Speaker, we have just said goodbye to one of the most respected officers of this legislative building today, Mr. Fred Dunn. Mr. Dunn and his staff go through these books on a year-to-year basis with a fine-tooth comb. They have given us unqualified support for every financial statement we've produced. The true cash cost of our government amortization this year is \$519 million, as stated very clearly in our book, and has followed the same accounting principles for years and years and years. There is no attempt to hide any spending.

**Mr. Anderson:** Oh. The last thing I need is a math lesson from a minister who has given us a \$15 billion red ink in the last two years.

The government appears to be financing their \$7.5 billion cash shortfall by debt financing. In fact, it is projected that by Budget 2012 Alberta will have incurred \$6 billion in debt, up from exactly zero when this Premier took over. In my view, this is disrespectful to the thousands of Albertans who sacrificed so much to rid our province of this debt. To the Premier: at what level are we going to stop the debt?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, obviously, the member should have been taking a better look at the books. Every chartered accountant agency in Alberta, also the federal group that oversees accountants in the country of Canada, keeps telling us and all Albertans that we have the most open and transparent books in the nation. We are not going to change that policy, and we'll continue to ensure that we're fully transparent with all of the spending that this Legislature approves.

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

### Health Care Budget

*(continued)*

**Mrs. McQueen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday in the budget the minister of finance announced that there would be a new five-year commitment to health care funding, including \$759 million to cover the accumulated deficit for the new superboard. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. What is the rationale behind paying off the health care deficit at this time? Why now?

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Well, Mr. Speaker, the simple answer is that a bill has been incurred as a result of providing the kind of health services Albertans need. That bill has manifested itself into a deficit, and it has to be paid. The important thing to remember is, of course, that those monies have already been spent. Now we're just covering them. Paying it off now also provides the new provincial board with a clean slate, as the Premier just indicated in the previous answer. The provincial board is working very hard still to find efficiencies now that we have all of this consistent information flowing in in consistent ways.

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

**Mrs. McQueen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With the new five-year commitment to funding and annual increases set out in the budget, what can we expect to see as improvements to our health care system as it pertains to accessibility and wait times, and how will the minister achieve these targets?

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Mr. Speaker, we're working very closely, obviously, with the delivery arm, which is Alberta Health Services, to ensure improvements, and those improvements will see themselves coming to be as a result of a predictable and stable funding plan. I should say that it's a five-year funding plan, a first for this province and, I believe, a first for all of Canada. We're going to reduce wait times for patients that are looking for help in the ER. We're going to also speed up the access time to specialists, and we're going to also speed up admission rates. So a lot is happening of a positive nature.

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

**Mrs. McQueen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituents want to know where we are going with health care in this province with the commitment of the five-year funding. Will the minister share a revised health care road map like Vision 2020 with Albertans, and if so, when?

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Mr. Speaker, a lot of that has already been shared with Albertans through the committee co-chaired by the MLA for Edmonton-Rutherford wherein the government accepted all four recommendations of the Minister's Advisory Committee on Health. That is one very clear indication that we're serious about addressing the issues that are on Albertans' minds. A blueprint for action will be ready through a consultative process that culminates in September, and an Alberta health act will soon follow thereafter.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

### PDD Funding

**Ms Pastoor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Monday in the House the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports stated that she had found the funds needed for the PDD budgets through administrative and efficiency savings. Could I ask the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports: would she table in the House the exact amount of funds that were clawed back from each PDD community board?

**Mrs. Jablonski:** Mr. Speaker, first of all, I'd like to thank the member opposite for giving me the opportunity to tell the good news about my budget from our recent budget announcement. I'm one of the very few ministries that received an increase, a 2.2 per cent increase, almost \$2 billion, and \$43 million to spend within my budget. The audits and the bookkeeping are all made available to the public on the Internet and through my ministry.

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

**Ms Pastoor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When I looked at the budget, it had gone from \$604 million to \$597 million. That was kind of, I think, a decrease.

Can the minister guarantee that PDD will not face another mid-year cut this coming year that would be identical to what's happened in the last few months?

**Mrs. Jablonski:** Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud to say that the PDD budget has remained the same, that we will be able to find efficiencies within our administration and be able to distribute those efficiencies back to the front-line services for our PDD people, and that the core supports that they're eligible for will remain the same.

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

**Ms Pastoor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. I have great respect for people who have the conviction to stand out in the cold on the Legislature steps because, apparently, they weren't allowed in. We had PDD-supported individuals, front-line staff, and families here today concerned over the future of their supports.

Has the minister actually talked to the front-line staff and those receiving support to ensure that the money taken back has not affected the quality of the supports that they depend on or that, in fact, they are still on a waiting list?

**Mrs. Jablonski:** Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud to say that I've had meetings in the last two weeks, one with a group of people from Edmonton who are families and stakeholders, service providers. On Monday I sat and I had a three-hour meeting with the Alberta community association for disability supports, ACDS. We were able to talk about their concerns and actually identify some solutions.

**The Speaker:** Hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, you made an allegation about people being denied access to this building. Would you kindly convey to me in writing which people, when, what day? What are the circumstances?

The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

### Calgary Transportation Infrastructure Funding

**Dr. Brown:** Mr. Speaker, as a fast-growing urban area Calgary needs municipal funding support from the province in order to keep pace with the demands of Calgarians to move to and from work. According to a 2006 study transportation and logistic infrastructure was also the number one selection criterion for companies when making a decision about where to put new businesses. My questions are all for the Minister of Transportation. Can the minister assure Calgarians that his department will continue to invest in critically needed transportation infrastructure in our city?

**Mr. Ouellette:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to tell the hon. member that I believe yesterday's budget was a very good-news budget, a budget that's right for this time. We're moving ahead on all the projects that we had planned. Just a few months ago we opened a large portion of the ring road in Calgary worth \$1 billion. The entire ring road in Calgary is now 45 per cent complete, and we're going to continue on till we get it done. We've also completed \$200 million worth of work on the Deerfoot, and just a couple of weeks . . .

**The Speaker:** And we'll get to it, I'm sure.

2:10

**Dr. Brown:** Mr. Speaker, that's all very well and good, but we do know that the local governments set their own priorities. What is the minister doing to ensure that the city of Calgary's priorities are accomplished in good time?

**Mr. Ouellette:** Well, Mr. Speaker, Alberta Transportation is providing substantial funding to the city of Calgary to be used towards their projects or their priorities. In fact, in the 2010-11 budget there's over \$160 million for Calgary through municipal infrastructure programs that includes the city transportation fund, basic capital grant fund, streets and improvements programs, and this is over and above the work that we are doing on our own provincial highways.

**Dr. Brown:** Mr. Speaker, there seems to be some confusion over exactly what is provincial jurisdiction and what is municipal jurisdiction when it comes to transportation. Can the minister clarify who is responsible for what when it comes to transportation in our urban areas?

**Mr. Ouellette:** Mr. Speaker, as you know, I always am pleased to bring clarity to this House. My department is responsible for maintaining the provincial highway network, and that includes the ring roads, Deerfoot Trail, and all commuter highways into the city.



Projects coming forward this year include 21 kilometres of the southeast ring road, three interchanges on Stoney Trail, continued upgrades to the Deerfoot, and there are also numerous waste-water and other area projects coming forward. No one can say that my department isn't providing adequate transportation infrastructure funding to all municipalities in Alberta, including Calgary.

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

#### Postsecondary Education Affordability

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday's budget was another reminder that this government does not understand the connection between investing in education and diversifying Alberta's economy. My questions are to the minister of advanced education. Given that yesterday's budget expanded access to loans but slashed funding for nonrepayable grants and bursaries, should Alberta students be grateful for the minister's facilitation of an even greater debt load?

**Mr. Horner:** Well, Mr. Speaker, in Alberta today we lead the nation with our scholarships even after this budget is tabled and even after we did reduce some of the scholarship funds and two of the grant funds. If I give out \$1 in grants, I can give out \$3 in loans for that same dollar. We want to help more students with the funds that we have.

**Mr. Chase:** You want to help more students go further into debt. Thank you for that clarification.

Mr. Speaker, education equals economy. By freezing operating grants to colleges and universities, is the minister signalling that he is going to allow institutions to replace the missing government funds through massive increases to tuition in professional faculties, which will effectively prohibit students from pursuing a professional career in Alberta?

**Mr. Horner:** No, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you very much. Students will look forward to that.

At least one university is also considering slapping students with a \$500 tax for nothing to fill its budget shortfall. Will the minister show leadership by placing limitations on these outrageous noninstructional fees?

**Mr. Horner:** Mr. Speaker, the fees that the hon. member is referring to are fees that all institutions in the province can levy that are outside the CPI cap. What we look at there is the overall affordability framework for students. We've lowered loans to prime. We have increased the amount of grants that we put out for graduate students and for undergraduate students over the last six years. We have increased the base operating grants to postsecondary institutions in the last six years by more than 42 per cent. That is second to none to anyone in North America.

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

**Mr. Cao:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week students at the University of Calgary joined together to protest the proposal to raise tuition in several professional programs, potentially making them out

of reach for many young Albertans. This is a huge concern for my constituents, for students who are making decisions on their university studies, and for parents who are fearful they will not be able to provide the help they had hoped for their children. My question today is to the Deputy Premier and Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. Why is the minister considering . . .

**The Speaker:** The minister, please. We've had the time.

**Mr. Horner:** Mr. Speaker, perhaps I can expand on the answer that I gave to the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity when I simply said no. What I want to be clear on is that this government and this Premier remain committed to the tuition cap, the CPI cap. Some of the postsecondary institutions felt that when we froze tuitions in 2004, there may have been some areas where we made an error because we didn't go to them first and say: is the tuition level for these programs correct? We may have made some errors.

**Mr. Cao:** To the same minister: did you or your department make any mistakes in 2004 when you froze tuitions?

**Mr. Horner:** Mr. Speaker, I believe that in 2004 the decision to freeze tuitions at the levels that they were at was the right decision. There were some specific programs that, potentially, we may have capped without consultation with either the students or the postsecondaries because it's about maintaining affordability, and it's about being able to maintain the program. Taxpayers in this province pay for 70 to 80 per cent of the cost of every program. The students pay the balance of that. We want to ensure that we're getting good value for the dollars and that we have set the right price.

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

**Mr. Cao:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: when can students and parents expect your decision so they can make their own financial decisions on postsecondary education?

**The Speaker:** The hon. Deputy Premier.

**Mr. Horner:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a good question because it is fair to say that the institutions and the parents of the students all want to have a timely decision so that this fall they can make the right decisions as to the programs that they may want to enter. It is certainly a top priority for this ministry and for me over the coming weeks to ensure that we get the proposals – I still have not seen the total proposals yet – and we'll make a decision as the time goes on.

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

#### Condominium Property Act Consultation

**Mr. Kang:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government's approach to problems is to strike a committee and leisurely review the situation while real people suffer. One area where Albertans deserve real action is on changes to the Condominium Property Act. Service Alberta says that it won't be ready until 2012. To the Minister of Service Alberta. The condo act is actually out of date and hasn't been substantially updated in 10 years. Does the ministry really think that making Alberta's condo owners wait another two years is acceptable?

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

**Mrs. Klimchuk:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to the review of the Condominium Property Act right now we are working with a Condominium Property Act committee which consists of condominium owners, lawyers, property managers, and insurance providers. Part of that team is looking at moving forward and looking at some of the issues that need to be brought forward when we begin the consultation on the Condominium Property Act in the spring of 2011.

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

**Mr. Kang:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the minister again: how many condo owners have to get lost in the system while your committee studies or looks at the problem or pays tens of thousands of dollars in legal fees before the minister decides to take action?

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

**Mrs. Klimchuk:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As said previously, the complexity of the Condominium Property Act was reviewed in 2000. Moving forward, we want to make sure that the review we do is comprehensive and effective, and the fact is that with the Ministry of Municipal Affairs, with the building codes there are issues there as well. When you look at some of the correspondence that's coming to my office with respect to condominium reserve funds, all of the issues that are out there, there are a lot of tough issues out there. So I'm very happy that a lot of Albertans are writing to me on that.

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

**Mr. Kang:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the minister again. The major problem with the condo act is that Albertans have to go to court to enforce it. Why is the minister not willing to move quickly to put some teeth into the condo act so Albertans don't have to go to court to enforce it?

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

**Mrs. Klimchuk:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Ultimately, with the Condominium Property Act, the way it's set up now, there are courses of action that individuals can take if they want to go to legal action.

Again, the review of the Condominium Property Act: there are so many new issues this year that were not there in 2000, so part of the problem is making sure that all of those issues are dealt with so that it's comprehensive and what we end up with is real and effective.

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

#### Renter Assistance

**Ms Notley:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year government locked the doors on rent support for new applicants in August, saying that they couldn't help the growing numbers of Albertans who couldn't make their rents because they were, effectively, out of money. Now, as a result of the government's policy to cut those who need help most, new applicants won't be considered even earlier in the year, if at all, and current recipients may be pushed out early. To the minister of housing: why is this government knowingly setting up a situation that will force Albertans out of their homes and onto the streets?

2:20

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

**Mr. Denis:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Nothing could be further from the truth. The member is correct. In fact, there is a \$13 million reduction coming from this program, but that's as a result of people being transitioned out of the system, people whom we've helped who no longer require our assistance. This ministry will continue to provide assistance to those people who need it the most. Thank you.

**Ms Notley:** Well, Mr. Speaker, there were actually copious people looking for that assistance after August last year, and they couldn't get it.

Now, yesterday the minister of housing said that it's not an entitlement program. I would disagree, and I'm supported in that opinion by the United Nations' declaration of human rights. Having a roof over your head is an entitlement, and if this minister doesn't believe that, he's in the wrong portfolio. Given his comments, will the minister tell this House exactly who he believes deserves housing and who he believes should end up on the streets?

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

**Mr. Denis:** Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite has raised an issue about our housing program and about whether or not there is an entitlement. In this government we believe in targeting the money to those who need it the most. Our policy is that we have a means test that is far more stringent than other provinces. Why? Because we want to help the people who are most in need. In British Columbia, for example: up to \$100,000 of assets and you can still receive funding under affordable housing. I think this is wrong. We should be giving money to those who need it the most.

**Ms Notley:** Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, last August you stopped giving money to those who needed it most.

Now, as of yesterday we have seen an overall depletion of funds for housing supports in this government for low-income people by one-third, so it's absolutely ludicrous for this government to pretend they're doing anything to address homelessness. Will the minister admit to all members that he has no intention of trying to end homelessness and that these misplaced priorities will actually make the problem worse?

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

**Mr. Denis:** Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. I believe in being compassionate not only to those in need but compassionate to the taxpayer. We will still be on track with our 10-year plan to end homelessness. We are on track to create 11,000 new affordable units by 2012. Perhaps the member should read our business plan.

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

**Mrs. Sarich:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government is supposedly working on that 10-year plan to end homelessness, but with the \$13 million cut to programs it's hard to take that commitment seriously. Rent support reduction runs contrary to the homelessness plan's main goal of getting people off the streets. To the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs: won't cutting rent supports only aggravate a problem your department is saying that it's trying to fix?

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

**Mr. Denis:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Housing and Urban Affairs is a hot topic today. I'm happy to hear that.

The Member for Edmonton-Decore is quite correct. Year over year we have reduced spending by about 19 per cent in our department; \$100 million of this comes from the discontinuation of a three-year funding plan to the municipalities. As I mentioned earlier, the measure of our success isn't so much how many housing units we build or how much money we put into the program but, rather, how many people we can transition out so that they no longer need assistance.

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

**Mrs. Sarich:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I only have one supplemental question. Before this budget about 80,000 Albertans a month, a good portion of them in Edmonton, were assisted through rent-support programs provided by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs. To the same minister: can he provide this House with an estimate of how many fewer Albertans will be helped out and what, if anything, he plans to do with them now?

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

**Mr. Denis:** Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. In this department we help people on a needs basis. Currently we're helping 80,000 people, on average, every month to pay their rent; 800 of these through transitioning are brought through the system every month.

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

#### **Bow Valley Wildlife Corridor**

**Mr. Hehr:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The fight for the completion of the Bow Valley wildlife corridor connecting Kananaskis to Banff has been going on for nearly two decades. Instead of simply completing the corridor, this government has stalled any action on the part of local municipalities and approved further recreational development in the area. To the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development: when will this ministry stop turning a blind eye to the building scientific evidence and complete the last three kilometres of this essential corridor?

**Mr. Knight:** Well, Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member would know, there is continuous work that goes on between a number of departments in this government, particularly SRD but others as well. The ministry that I came from, Energy, and I believe Environment also and Municipal Affairs all have some hand in working towards solutions to these problems. We'll continue to do that.

**Mr. Hehr:** Well, I like to hear that all the ministries are working together, but it's been two decades, so they're working together rather slowly. Anyway, if they could complete some of this corridor with the minimum 450 metres and include this action in the South Saskatchewan regional plan – will those be included in the corridor when it's complete?

**Mr. Knight:** Mr. Speaker, I would not be able to estimate at what point in time the whole corridor will be complete. I think we've had discussions over a period of time, that I could probably recall as likely 25 years, on the Y to Y corridor. This may or may not be part

of that broader discussion. We'll continue to work with the parties involved.

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

**Mr. Hehr:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Like you indicated, it has been 25 years, and this corridor is crucial to the survival of many species, including – get this – grizzly bears. The BearSmart program is not sufficient action on the part of this government. Will this minister take the necessary steps and complete the Bow Valley corridor now?

**Mr. Knight:** Well, Mr. Speaker, you know, the issue around species at risk is a very serious concern not only for Albertans but all Canadians. Many of the species at risk have been identified in the province of Alberta. We work very, very hard with all of the people that use the landscape for recreation, for activities in industry relative to agriculture, the forestry business, and others. From the point of view of just, "Let's build a corridor someplace, and then everything is going to be fine," I think the issue is much broader than that. We're looking at it in the land-use framework and will develop the proper amount of space for Alberta's wildlife.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

#### **Long-term Care Facility for Didsbury**

**Mr. Marz:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituents from Didsbury and area have been waiting for years now for a new long-term care facility that's needed to replace a very old and substandard one. In fact, seven different ministers of health have been appointed to this portfolio during this wait time and still no new facility in sight. My question is to the current Minister of Health and Wellness. What can I tell the people of Didsbury and district this time? Are we getting this desperately needed new facility or not?

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I think you can safely tell them to remain cautiously optimistic. That would include their knowing that I'm aware of the need and that we have an assessment going on right now. I'll ask immediately for that assessment to be sped up so we can get that answer factually back to this hon. member ASAP.

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

**Mr. Marz:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the minister for that answer. The throne speech stated that monies raised by Alberta capital bonds would be used to replace continuing care and supportive living facilities. Why doesn't the minister just commit to using some of those funds to build this facility now and just get on with it while construction costs remain low?

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Mr. Speaker, part of the answer, of course, is going to be unveiled here very soon, when we come forward with the capital plan for health facilities. That is being worked on as we speak. I will have the details, hopefully, ready just at the time the calendar switches over into the new fiscal year, and I'm hoping that the funds that will come in from the capital bonds issue will help complement our existing capital plan. We'll ensure that this project is given fair consideration.

**Mr. Marz:** Again to the same minister. Our population in this area has grown significantly, and we have been waiting for so long for

this replacement facility that we now may actually need up to a hundred beds, not just 60. Would the minister ensure that the growth and aging factors will be included as part of your capital plan process for the Didsbury facility?

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

**Mr. Zwodzesky:** Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I drove through the area in question, Didsbury and the surrounding area, not long ago. I'm well aware of the needs there. I'm very familiar with the need for other health care facilities across the province, not just in Didsbury but elsewhere, and I will ensure that the factors that he's mentioned are included in that assessment along with all the other factors that health care providers and community caring people such as the hon. member have provided to us.

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

### Oil Sands Tailings Ponds Regulation

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's tailings ponds give us an international black eye. They are an underfunded liability to Albertans and industry. They kill wildlife, and there's a strong suspicion that they leak. We can't blame industry for their choices or lack of action if the government doesn't give clear, enforceable targets. Last year the ERCB put forward tailings performance criteria, and in October it was reported that seven of the nine projects will not meet the criteria by 2011 and some not for another 40 years. To the minister: is the minister concerned that these companies aren't meeting the ERCB's criteria?

2:30

**Mr. Renner:** Well, Mr. Speaker, one of the issues that you have to deal with when you're a regulator is balancing retrofits as opposed to new construction, and therein lies the issue. How do we incorporate new technology into existing facilities? When the member talks about adherence to a new policy, I can assure her that the new developments will be required to adhere to the new policy. How we bring older developments up to those new standards will take some time.

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

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. These tailings ponds can be seen from outer space.

Back to the same minister: what are the penalties if companies fail to meet the targets?

**Mr. Renner:** Mr. Speaker, seeing something from space hardly qualifies it as an environmental hazard. I'd suggest that there are a lot of other things that can be seen from space as well.

The fact of the matter is that we have standards in this province. We hold companies accountable to meet those standards, and we continually strive to move those standards forward. The way we deal with tailings ponds in the long term is by changing the technology. That reduces the need for the tailings ponds in the first place.

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

**Ms Blakeman:** Thanks. I take it there are no penalties if they fail to meet the target, so the next question to the minister: when will this government require that best practice for cleanup technology be implemented by all companies across the board?

**Mr. Renner:** It's really fun to be in the opposition, Mr. Speaker, because you can pretty much say anything you want and never be held accountable.

Like I said, Mr. Speaker, there are two very important factors when we discuss best practices. One is on new developments, and clearly there is an opportunity and a need for us to have best practices. The other is: how do you retrofit existing facilities? I can assure this member that we are pushing the envelope very hard on industry to come up on both sides of the equation, retrofitting the existing and bringing the new ones online with the best technology available.

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

### Propane Pricing

**Mr. VanderBurg:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the past little while there have been significant decreases in the cost of electricity, oil, and natural gas, and it has made life more affordable for many Albertans. At the same time the cost of propane has increased dramatically, and consumers like my constituent John Isley have felt the pinch. To the Minister of Energy: can you explain to me and to everyone here why the cost of propane has increased so much while other forms of energy have so dramatically decreased over the last couple years?

**Mr. Liepert:** Well, Mr. Speaker, the member makes some statements and assumptions in his preamble and talks about significant decreases in the cost of electricity, oil, and natural gas over the past two years. Clearly, those prices have gone up and down, and that's the commodity market we're in. I think it's a little bit of a stretch to say that the price of propane has gone up dramatically. While we don't necessarily regulate the price of propane or any of the other fuels, we do monitor fuel prices, and propane for the most part has remained steady over the past year.

**Mr. VanderBurg:** Well, given that answer, maybe you can explain to me and to this Assembly how the price of propane is linked to the price of natural gas. I always understood that there was some type of a link between the two.

**Mr. Liepert:** Well, the linkage is that propane is a by-product of both natural gas and oil through the refining process, but the price itself is not necessarily linked. As I said in my first answer, they are all commodities. They trade on the international commodity market. Prices go up and down. A lot of the price is set, in the situation of propane, on a local supply-and-demand basis, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. VanderBurg:** Well, given that answer, again, I'll go back to the Alberta gas protection act, when prices were \$5.50 for natural gas, 50 cents for propane. Propane, 73 cents: I think it's time that we enact a protection plan for those consumers. What are you going to do about it, Minister?

**Mr. Liepert:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I think what we're going to do about it is that we're going to ensure that we don't pick particular segments of the economy or of industry to subsidize and not subsidize. I think we made it very clear when the natural gas rebate program expired about close to year ago now that we wanted to ensure that we promoted energy efficiency and conservation. Any time you start subsidizing, that doesn't happen.

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

### Executive Council Budget

**Mr. Hinman:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is no question that the best way to lead is by example. Albertans are doing this by balancing their budgets. The problem is that the Premier and the Executive Council are not. In recent years the Public Affairs Bureau has almost doubled to \$14.3 billion, a modest 8 per cent cut. My question is to the President of the Treasury Board. Why does this government not lead by example and cut the Public Affairs Bureau in half, to \$7 billion?

**Mr. Snelgrove:** Mr. Speaker, the Executive Council has cut their spending this year by 8.6 per cent. The Public Affairs Bureau in Alberta has a very important job to do. When you are a marketer of products that go around the world, the story that we have here needs to be sold around the world. It also in many cases needs to be sold right here in Alberta so that Albertans that want to understand the facts about the oil sands or the facts about government spending or the facts about accounting principles get the true story.

**Mr. Hinman:** Well, Mr. Speaker, maybe they should break it down so that Albertans can really see if there's any value for it. I think they only promote their own propaganda.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans want the Alberta advantage back, not billion-dollar deficits. Will the President of the Treasury Board please explain to Albertans why there's a \$7 million program to rebrand the Alberta initiative?

**Mr. Snelgrove:** So things like this don't happen, Mr. Speaker: U.S. firms won't use the tar sands because there are people, some in this House, that have the opportunity to go around and talk about the tar sands as if they're evil and bad and that many, many Albertans don't enjoy a good standard of living from them. Many don't understand how much of Canada depends on the economic engine of Alberta. Do we feel we have a little bit of responsibility to go around the world and around this continent and sell Alberta's story in a correct and factual manner? We certainly think we do.

**Mr. Hinman:** This is the problem, Mr. Speaker. They're spending \$7 million for this freedom to create when they just destroy what people are creating here. Reckless spending is never acceptable, and in these tough times it's even less desirable. The question is: why aren't front-line services like health care, education, seniors, and providing for people with developmental disabilities accessible? Will the President of the Treasury Board do the right thing and transfer \$20 million from the Executive Council budget to these important services?

**Mr. Snelgrove:** Mr. Speaker, what I would do is challenge the people at home that are watching this Assembly to get a pad and paper out and put it by their desk and to start to keep track of just how the questions come. Are they spending today? Are they saving today? Are they for business? Are they against business? I started last year myself. I had to create a whole new column: is it relevant to anything that people are concerned about? That column was overtaking the spending or saving. People really need to watch, keep track for themselves, and they can judge. Are the questions here relevant, prudent, towards government policy, or are they simply about them pushing their own agenda?

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

### Tuition Fees for Postsecondary Education

**Ms Notley:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government claims to understand that the way out of this recession rests on the ability of Albertans to be part of a more educated workforce. Now, last summer they inexplicably gave \$180 million back to the liquor industry, yet today they're asking students to take on \$50 million more debt in order to get an education. Will the Minister of Advanced Education admit that this example of misplaced priorities is going to make education even less accessible for the Albertans who need it at the same time that liquor is more so?

**Mr. Horner:** Mr. Speaker, I really don't see the connection there. What I will say is that we have not eliminated the loan relief completion program, which actually remits and forgives student loans for students who have completed their programs and who are in need. I'll reiterate what I said earlier today. That is that we want to help as many students as we possibly can to achieve their dreams in our postsecondary institutions, and that's exactly what we're doing.

**Ms Notley:** Well, Mr. Speaker, they're achieving their dreams while they take on more and more debt.

Now, the U of A is talking about hitting students with a fee increase of roughly \$500 a year, more or less 10 per cent of what tuition fees would be. This is in part because the government is failing to invest in the growing university sector by freezing their operating dollars. How can you possibly claim to be using advanced education as a means to grow our economy when your funding policy clearly is designed to shift more costs to the very students you're hoping to attract to higher education?

2:40

**Mr. Horner:** Actually, Mr. Speaker, our funding policy is not designed to shift costs to students. Our funding policy is designed to ensure that we have the best system in North America and, in fact, parts of the globe. It's designed to ensure that we have accessible and affordable postsecondary education for every student who wants and desires it. It's designed to ensure that there's an investment by the students. The hon. member, you know, doesn't seem to realize that the students' investment in their future is important not only to them but to society as a whole. I think what we've developed as a postsecondary funding formula, that we're rolling out this budget, is second to none.

**Ms Notley:** Mr. Speaker, the minister suggested in the past that allowing astronomical increases to tuition in certain programs isn't really an increase; rather, it's just a reassessment of the original tuition level that was in place when they put in place their cap. But, really, it doesn't matter how tortured a communications spin you put on the increase. The students paying tens of thousands more dollars each year for certain programs will still pay it, or they'll choose not to enrol. My question simply is: will you resist all requests to increase tuition in any program beyond the inflationary limits that you claim to have in place right now?

**Mr. Horner:** Mr. Speaker, the freeze that we put on tuitions in 2004 was done very quickly, and perhaps in some areas of the over 3,500 different tuition levels across the province we may have made an error in one or two of those tuition levels. All we've said to the postsecondaries is that we're willing to look at a proposal from them – this is not from government; from them – that would illustrate

whether or not there was an error made. If there was an error made, in order to protect the CPI cap, I think it behooves us to fix that error. We've had that discussion with the students. They understand what I'm trying to accomplish with the postsecondaries. I don't understand why the hon. member doesn't.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, 18 members were recognized today: 12 opposition members, six government members. There were 106 questions and answers.

In a few seconds from now we will return to the Routine.

### Presenting Petitions

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

**Mr. Fawcett:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to present a petition of 84 signatures petitioning the Legislative Assembly of Alberta for the preservation of the current charitable gaming model. It says: "We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government to maintain the current policy for distribution of charitable gaming proceeds."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

### Introduction of Bills

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

#### Bill 2

#### Professional Statutes Amendment Act, 2010

**Ms Woo-Paw:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 2, the Professional Statutes Amendment Act, 2010.

This bill, if passed, would paraphrase the Health Professions Act by requiring professional regulatory organizations to consult with the ministers responsible and consider their comments prior to removing or approving a program of study for registration requirements. This omnibus bill would ensure this provision is included in the Architects Act; the Engineering, Geological and Geophysical Professions Act; the Land Surveyors Act; the Professional and Occupational Associations Registration Act; the Regulated Accounting Profession Act; and the Veterinary Profession Act. If passed, Bill 2 would also update the language in both the Agrology Profession Act and the Regulated Forestry Profession Act, both of which have similar provisions already in place.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 2 read a first time]

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

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 2 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

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

#### Bill 3

#### Fatal Accidents Amendment Act, 2010

**Mr. Weadick:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to request leave to introduce first reading of Bill 3, the Fatal Accidents Amendment Act, 2010.

This legislation will amend section 8 of the Fatal Accidents Act, which awards a set amount of damages for bereavement to a

surviving spouse; adult interdependent partner, or AIP; parent; or child of a deceased person. The current act limits the class of claimants eligible for damages. The limits are: no damages to parents if their deceased child was married or had an AIP and no damages to a child of a deceased person if the child was married or had an AIP.

The proposed amendment will remove references to marital status currently found in section 8 of the act. This reflects a decision made by the Alberta Court of Appeal and the current state of law in Alberta.

The amendments will also remove the reference to illegitimacy as the current act defines child to include an illegitimate child. Consistent with current demographics and family law legislation all children are treated as children of their parents regardless of the parents' relationship.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 3 read a first time]

**Mr. Hancock:** I would like to move that Bill 3 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

### Tabling Returns and Reports

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

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is an e-mail correspondence from Erin Kinloch-Galesloot regarding cutbacks to persons with disabilities. She is an individual with a disability, and having been supported by PDD, she's been able to live independently with a roommate and work at a paying job like everyone else. She's very concerned that with the current cutbacks in PDD she's going to lose that.

The second e-mail is from Geoffrey Ryan, who's also a constituent. He is also writing with concerns over PDD funding cuts, expressing his utter disdain over the proposed cuts and worried specifically about how the funding cuts would affect the chances of finding a group home for his brother who has Goldenhar syndrome. He's very worried about the burden that will be placed on the family.

Thank you.

### Tablings to the Clerk

**The Clerk:** I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mrs. Klimchuk, Minister of Service Alberta, errata for pages 15 and 342 of the 2010-11 government estimates, tabled on February 9, 2010.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Liepert, Minister of Energy, a report dated December 23, 2009, entitled Assessment and Analysis of the State-of-the-Art Electric Transmission Systems with Specific Focus on High-Voltage Direct Current, Underground or Other New or Developing Technologies, prepared by Stantec.

2:50

### Orders of the Day

#### Government Motions

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

**The Speaker:** This motion is not debatable.

[Government Motion 2 carried]

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

**The Speaker:** This motion also is nondebatable.

[Government Motion 3 carried]

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

#### Standing Orders Amendments

6. Mr. Hancock moved:
- A. Be it resolved that the standing orders of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta be amended by adding the following after Standing Order 52.01:  
27th Legislature  
52.011 For the balance of the 27th Legislature the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices, the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services, and each of the policy field committees shall consist of 12 Members.
  - B. Be it further resolved that
    - (1) The amendments in this motion come into force on passage;
    - (2) The amendments in this motion shall have effect until the conclusion of the 27th Legislature.

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This motion is with respect to the makeup of committees and changes that need to be made in that area.

**The Speaker:** This motion is debatable. Anybody want to participate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I understand the need for this motion, and in principle I support it in that the Government House Leader has chosen to expand the number of positions on these committees in order to incorporate the inclusion of members who are representing a fourth party in the Assembly now. I certainly do support that participation.

My concern is a small one, more under the heading of a quibble. Nonetheless, I think it's worth putting it on the record, and that is that the Government House Leader has chosen to make Government Motion 6 be in effect until the conclusion of the 27th Legislature. Given the flux that we are experiencing at this moment, I'm less comfortable with having this put in place for effectively two years. We're still expecting that we wouldn't see the next election until approximately two years from now, in the spring of 2012, which leaves us this spring sitting, fall sitting in 2010, spring in 2011, fall in 2011, and possibly a spring sitting in 2012 until we would revert back to the previous standing orders.

I would have preferred to see it in place just for 2010, given that there's still some expectation there could be changes in membership of various caucuses. [interjection] Well, not that I'm planning on doing, but I keep hearing that this is going to happen. The Government House Leader might be in a better position to be talking about who is shifting from which side to another. Nobody is moving here, so I'm fine. But that was my concern overall, that we are putting this in place for, really, an extended period of time. It's half of the

sitting time for the 27th Legislature, and I just found that was being a bit more enthusiastic than I think we needed with this particular motion. As I say, I do support the principle of including and recognizing the need to have participation on the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices, on Members' Services, and on the policy field committees, of which there are five, to have the participation of individuals from different caucuses.

Thanks for the opportunity to put that on the record. I appreciate it. In principle I support what the government is doing here. It's the timing I'm not so happy about.

**The Speaker:** It's a debatable motion if others want to participate.

Shall I call on the Government House Leader to close the debate or just call the question?

**Mr. Hancock:** Call the question.

[Government Motion 6 carried]

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

#### Committee Membership Changes

7. Mr. Hancock moved:  
Be it resolved that the following changes to
- (a) the Standing Committee on Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund be approved: that Ms Tarchuk replace Mr. Campbell, that Ms Tarchuk replace Mrs. Forsyth as chair, that Mr. Groeneveld replace hon. Mr. Denis, that Mr. Quest replace Mr. Kang;
  - (b) the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices be approved: that Mr. Quest replace Mr. Horne, that Mr. Lindsay replace hon. Mr. Lukaszuk, that Mr. Hinman be appointed to fill a vacancy;
  - (c) the Standing Committee on Private Bills be approved: that Mr. Hinman replace Mr. Anderson, that Mr. Kang replace Mr. MacDonald, that Mr. Xiao replace Mrs. Forsyth, that Mr. Drysdale replace Mr. Quest;
  - (d) the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing be approved: that Mr. Groeneveld replace Mr. Johnson, that Mr. Hinman replace hon. Mr. Liepert, that Mr. Jacobs replace hon. Mr. Oberle, that Mr. Lindsay replace hon. Ms Redford, that Mr. Quest replace Mr. Rogers, that Ms Tarchuk replace hon. Mr. Zwozdesky;
  - (e) the Standing Committee on Public Accounts be approved: that Mr. Rodney replace Mr. Quest, that Mr. Rodney replace Mr. Quest as deputy chair, that Mr. Anderson replace hon. Mr. Denis, that Mr. Weadick replace Mr. Jacobs, that Ms Calahasen replace Mr. Drysdale;
  - (f) the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services be approved: that Mr. Campbell replace Mr. Fawcett, that Mr. Campbell replace hon. Mr. Oberle as deputy chair, that Mr. Anderson be appointed to fill a vacancy;
  - (g) the Standing Committee on Community Services be approved: that Mr. Bhullar replace Mr. Bhardwaj, that Mr. Anderson replace hon. Mr. Lukaszuk;
  - (h) the Standing Committee on the Economy be approved: that Mr. Bhardwaj replace Mr. Campbell, that Mr. Bhardwaj replace Mr. Campbell as chair, that Mr. Fawcett replace Mr. Bhullar, that Mr. Lund replace Mr. McFarland, that Ms Woo-Paw replace Mr. Xiao, that Mr. Boutilier be appointed to fill a vacancy;

- (i) the Standing Committee on Health be approved: that Mr. McFarland replace Mr. Horne as chair, that Mr. Groeneveld replace Mr. Dallas, that Mr. Lindsay replace Mr. Fawcett, that Mrs. Forsyth be appointed to fill a vacancy;
- (j) the Standing Committee on Public Safety and Services be approved: that Mr. Drysdale replace Mr. VanderBurg, that Mr. Drysdale replace Mr. VanderBurg as chair, that Mr. Rogers replace Mr. Anderson, that Mr. Xiao replace Ms Woo-Paw, that Mr. Boutilier be appointed to fill a vacancy, that Mrs. Forsyth be appointed to fill a vacancy;
- (k) the Standing Committee on Resources and Environment be approved: that Mr. Dallas replace hon. Mr. Denis, that Mr. Mitzel replace Mr. Drysdale, that Mr. VanderBurg replace hon. Mr. Oberle, that Mr. Anderson be appointed to fill a vacancy;
- (l) the Select Special Auditor General Search Committee be approved: that Mr. Quest replace hon. Mr. Lukaszuk.

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a result of the last motion we now have the opportunity both to add members to the committees in respect of the fact that there are a number more members sitting as independents in the House under the WRA Party banner and to make changes to the standing committees based on the fact that there have been changes in Executive Council and other changes on our caucus side. I have requested changes from both the Liberal caucus and the ND caucus. There were a couple provided, and they've been incorporated. This should accomplish everything we need to accomplish, at least pending further developments as speculated by the House leader from the opposition side. I don't know who she was talking about from her caucus that might be moving, but this should accomplish it for us.

**The Speaker:** It's a debatable motion.

Shall I call on the hon. Government House Leader to close the debate or call the question, then?

**Hon. Members:** Question.

[Government Motion 7 carried]

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, before we go on, the chair wants to raise a point with respect to the last two motions, 6 and 7. I'm pleased that there's agreement in the House. There's nothing in either of these motions about where the funds are to come and pay for these extra stipends and salaries. This is not the first time that this has happened in this Assembly, and it becomes incumbent upon, then, the Speaker to try and find the funds. So I'm going to listen very attentively to hon. members in this Assembly in their questions and their responses about spending without making decisions as to where the spending is to come from when I have to deal with this matter.

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

### 3:00 Provincial Fiscal Policies

- 5. Dr. Morton moved:  
Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly approve in general the business plans and fiscal policies of the government.

[Adjourned debate February 9: Ms Blakeman]

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As Leader of the Official Opposition it's a duty and privilege to rise today and respond to

yesterday's budget. I'm frankly astounded by the haphazard nature of this budget: massive spending increases in certain areas offset by drastic cuts in others. Far from striking a balance, this budget throws Alberta wildly off balance with no plan for sustainable spending and our province's future prosperity in jeopardy. This is a balancing act all right, but it's like a high-wire performance, a big show for the audience with potentially catastrophic consequences. Only it's like the minister of finance is sitting safely on the sidelines, poking Albertans out onto the high wire without a net.

Over and over again during my time as Leader of the Opposition I've stated my belief that Alberta is in dire need of government that understands the importance of planning for the long term. Albertans have told me that they share this view, but clearly this Tory administration has no concept of what a long-term plan entails. Why else would they lurch from budget to budget, shifting priorities on the fly, commissioning studies only to abandon them, ignoring the advice of our Auditor General, and passing a law to make deficit spending illegal only to repeal that law as soon as oil and gas prices collapse? Is it a spending problem, or is it really a competence problem, Mr. Speaker? We believe this budget confirms that this government has a competence problem.

Both as a physician and a medical officer of health I took a careful, comprehensive approach to assessing problems, coming up with solutions in consultation with patients, and following up to be sure that my solutions were working then amending as necessary. For example, if a patient came into the office with a headache, I couldn't just give him a pill and send him away. I needed to know his medical history, what other medications he might be taking, what other medical conditions he had, problems at home and work, and so on. Once deciding together on a course of action, we would monitor the patient's progress together and make changes to treatment as necessary.

The same common-sense approach must be applied and should be applied to policy problems. The state of public health care, the condition of our economy, social issues such as homelessness and child care: all of these require a responsible leadership to consider the big picture without the baggage of ideology or personal prejudice. Comprehensive analysis, full assessment, action, monitoring, and amendments as needed: that's the approach a responsible government would take to the big issues of the day. Instead, we have ad hoc policy designed to address partisan political problems while many equally important issues get swept under the rug.

The cut to children's services, for example, is a scandal. The decision to slash nearly \$40 million from a crucial program is beneath contempt, especially when the amount being cut is the same as the amount being devoted to subsidizing the dying horse-racing industry. Mr. Speaker, Albertans care about children a helluva lot more than they care about horse racing. I'm profoundly disappointed by the lack of empathy and short-sightedness displayed by this administration's decision, especially given the news stories of troubled foster families this past week.

Yesterday I talked about the impact of this administration's cuts on Alberta's students – the next generation of engineers, tradesmen, scientists, doctors, artists, the leaders and builders of tomorrow – over \$200 million cut from Advanced Education and Technology, creating even higher student debt and imperilling access to postsecondary education. If there's one investment that could lead to creating a sustainable economy for Alberta, surely it's education. But this administration, with typical short-sightedness, just made it harder for countless Albertans to achieve their full potential. The consequences of this decision will affect Alberta's prosperity for a long, long time to come.



It certainly makes it no easier to address our critical shortages of health care professionals. That \$2 billion added to the health care budget won't help much without new doctors and professionals to make the system work. Clearly, the heartfelt but logical appeal of University of Calgary medical students Rithesh Ram and Natarie Liu, whose letters I read yesterday in the House, fell on deaf ears. Student debt, already crippling, is going to rise even higher, and I don't see how the minister of advanced education is going to deny any of the proposed tuition increases given these cuts. High youth unemployment, declined registered education savings plan values, frozen minimum wage: all these factors, combined with this administration's cuts to advanced education, make this a terrible time to be a postsecondary student in Alberta.

Slashing income supports in an economic recession shows not only a lack of compassion for Albertans struggling to cope but again reinforces this administration's reputation for short-sightedness. You predict that the unemployment picture is not going to improve in the near term, so why cut benefits? They're going to be needed, especially since employment lags behind general economic growth. It takes time to recover lost jobs. In the meantime Alberta families will struggle to cope.

The choices made by this administration reveal a, quote, flavour-of-the-month mentality. It recognized correctly that Albertans are concerned about health care, but rather than addressing the complex problems of management and resource allocation, it has decided to take the easy road and, in relation to health care in particular, throw money at the problem.

I can't imagine how the minister of finance wrapped his head around this administration's incredible \$2 billion increase in health care spending. In fact, there was a comment on Twitter yesterday that I thought was both funny and revealing. I'm paraphrasing: Mr. Premier, when your finance minister is in tears while reading the budget, that's not a good sign.

You know, if I'd called upon this government to increase the health budget by \$2 billion, the heckling from that side of the Assembly might very well have brought the House down around our heads. Yet here we have an ideologically conservative administration, or at least, certainly, an ideologically conservative minister, or so he tries to appear, telling Albertans that their prescription for saving health care is throwing dump truckloads full of money at the system. As a medical doctor I can tell you that, yes, the system needs money, but what it needs most is competent management. Given this administration's disastrous record with public health care, why should anyone believe that this huge increase in the system's budget will actually lead to better results?

This administration's own throne speech, delivered just days ago, admitted that Alberta receives far less value per dollar spent on health care than other provinces. Now we'll receive even less value per dollar, because I don't trust this administration to use those extra resources any more efficiently. In fact, by cutting child intervention services and income supports, this will foster situations that cause bad health outcomes for hundreds, perhaps thousands of Albertans, and they'll wind up in the health care system, costing that system much more in the long run.

I find it incredibly ironic that two years ago this very administration was trying to tell Albertans that health care spending was out of control. Oscar Wilde might not have been a big fan of consistency, but I think most Albertans do not want a government that's constantly sending out mixed messages.

A few months ago this administration claimed that it could find \$2 billion in savings through greater efficiency. You seem to have come up about \$700 million short and certainly haven't found any appreciable efficiencies in health care, not when, as I explained yesterday, there are cases of keeping patients in intensive care units

for days at a cost of thousands of dollars rather than shelling out less than a hundred dollars for antibiotics. Or cases like a former friend forced to wait too long for what would have been an easy, inexpensive gall bladder operation, but delays resulted in a potentially life-threatening infection, costing the system thousands of dollars and, more importantly, resulting in a vastly less desirable health outcome for my friend.

Yesterday in my response to the throne speech I shared some stories from the many Albertans who have contacted us with stories of how they're trying to cope with this administration's mistakes. I shared those stories because I think it's important that we all remember that the decisions we make as elected representatives have real impacts on real people every day: our neighbours, our fellow citizens, the people that we have been entrusted to serve. When we fail them, we fail in our primary reason for being in the Assembly. I hope that at least a few government members will take these stories to heart because we all share some responsibility for them.

### 3:10

Here is one I did not bring up yesterday.

After 10 years of billions of dollars in surplus we now find ourselves with \$4 billion in deficit. Where did the money go? I live on a disability pension; I don't have lot of money to throw around. I have multiple sclerosis, and on occasion I need a chiropractor and some adjustments. But Mr. Liepert saw fit to delist these treatments, and now I cannot afford to go to a chiropractor. I have no balance. I fall frequently and require adjustments often. Also, I cannot afford my prescriptions because the minister of health raised the price of the plus for Blue Cross from \$44.00 to \$82.00 per month. Doctor appointments are over a month's wait. The more you can do, please do, and more power to you. We need help.

Here's another.

I asked for hospital beds, not a \$250 million a year ambulance transition. In April this year Alberta Health Services took over emergency medical services throughout Alberta at a cost of \$250 million a year, forever, after refusing to release publicly the findings of the EMS discovery project in the former Peace and Palliser health regions. What is our health minister trying to hide? I wrote my local government MLA and received this response from her in writing. She stated: "I am unable to share these findings with you," and later, "The findings of the EMS discovery projects cannot be released publicly." Disgusting. Very George Bush style of governance. This was a great selling feature to taxpayers. For example, in Calgary, where EMS operations were close to \$30 million a year, this was not supposed to be passed down to us. Then why is it I am now facing a 4.8 per cent property tax increase? The system is clearly not working.

To conclude, Mr. Speaker, believe me, these stories represent just the tip of the iceberg. To paraphrase Shakespeare: this surely is the winter of Alberta discontent. This budget uses a boatload of cash to wallpaper over problems while failing to address fundamental issues of poor governance, mismanagement, and the failure to consider the long-term implications of habitual, moment-to-moment decision-making. I believe that as a society we must do our best to live within our means so that future generations will not be compromised. As our First Nations citizens might say: we do not inherit the earth from our ancestors; we borrow it from our children.

This budget borrows heavily indeed from the next generation of Albertans. I only wish I could believe that this administration had the skills to put this loan to best use. Clearly, Mr. Speaker, we are dealing no longer with merely a financial problem but with a competence problem. There is a better way.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Hon. leader, you were aware you had up to 90 minutes if you so chose? Okay. Thank you very much.

The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

**Mr. Anderson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm grateful to rise on behalf of the Wildrose Alliance opposition caucus and also on behalf of the hundreds of thousands of very disappointed fiscally responsible Albertans across this great province of ours to respond to this government's latest red ink smeared budget.

Mr. Speaker, Budget 2010 is a stunning illustration of the profound mismanagement of our province's finances by this PC government. According to Budget 2010 the government of Alberta is expecting to spend roughly \$38.7 billion this year against revenues of approximately \$34 billion. This implies a budgetary deficit of \$4.7 billion. An additional \$2.8 billion in so-called capital investment is not accounted for in the government's current deficit projection. Again, I would point to page 18 of the government's 2010 fiscal plan. This brings the government's real cash deficit to a staggering \$7.55 billion, which it plans on financing using debt, which is now reaching about \$4.4 billion from the past two years, and draining the province's sustainability fund from roughly \$15 billion last year to \$8.2 this year, and optimistically down to \$2.8 billion by 2012. This vast swath of red ink is similar to that of Budget 2009 and is evidence that this government has yet again failed to bring spending under control despite repeated warnings to do so or face the prospect of higher taxes, a return to massive debts, and further erosion of the Alberta advantage.

A Wildrose Alliance government would not permit this to happen, Mr. Speaker. Although Albertans expect their elected representatives to protect front-line social programs like health, education, and PDD while providing critical public infrastructure, they also expect their government to responsibly protect the Alberta advantage, live within their means, and prioritize needs before wants.

Although erasing the \$7.55 billion cash deficit in one year is not practically possible without heavy cuts, the Wildrose Alliance opposition caucus believes the government can cut this cash deficit by approximately \$4.67 billion down to roughly \$2.88 billion, which is a 62 per cent reduction from the government's projected cash deficit of \$7.55 billion.

We can do this as a House by implementing the following spending adjustments. First off, we should spread the \$20.1 billion capital budget over 4.5 years rather than three years. This yields a budgetary savings of nearly \$2.79 billion in 2010 alone. This would still leave Alberta's per-person capital expenditures slightly above that of British Columbia and behind only Newfoundland and Quebec.

Second, we should indeed increase health and educational operational spending, but we should do so in line with inflation plus population growth, which the government says is 3.5 per cent, rather than the astounding Budget 2010 increases of 13.7 per cent in health and 4.6 per cent in education. This would yield a savings in 2010 of \$1.33 billion.

Next, we would suggest delaying, until the economy recovers, the Green TRIP mass transit initiative for a savings of \$70 million.

We would cancel the wasteful and unproven \$2 billion carbon capture and storage experiment, saving Albertans \$100 million this year.

We would eliminate Alberta's venture capital fund. Governments should not be allocating funds to private business ventures. This would return \$100 million to the balance sheet in 2010.

We would also cut corporate subsidies for product commercialization. The government, as Premier Klein said over and over again, has no business being in business. This would save Albertans an additional \$110 million in Budget 2010.

With all due respect to the former minister of agriculture, who is a good friend and was a very competent minister, we would suggest terminating the Alberta Livestock and Meat Agency. Marketing

beef is a role for private farmers, agricultural marketing organizations, and private business, not the government of Alberta. This correction will save roughly \$50 million in 2010.

We would reduce the size of cabinet from 23 to 16 by combining, among others, Infrastructure with Transportation, Treasury Board with Finance and Enterprise, Municipal Affairs with Housing and Urban Affairs, just to name a few examples. This will save Albertans approximately \$44 million.

We would end the direct subsidization of horse racing to the tune of \$25 million per year.

Through retirement and natural attrition we would increase the government's worker-to-manager ratio from its current 4 to 1 ratio to 12 to 1, understanding that the ratio in the private sector can be as high as 25 to 1. Surely we can come halfway. This will save Albertans approximately \$35 million this year alone.

We would cut the government's communications/Public Affairs budget in half, saving taxpayers \$7 million.

We would end Executive Council's wasteful and misguided rebranding initiative and save \$7 million this year alone.

Again, these proposals will reduce this government's real cash deficit of \$7.55 billion by \$4.67 billion to a much lower and more manageable deficit number of \$2.88 billion. It is also important to note that these proposed adjustments would not cut the government services Albertans deem most important, such as health care, education, PDD, seniors, or public security. They would simply limit their departmental increases to the rate of inflation plus population growth.

### 3:20

More importantly, these adjustments make it possible to eliminate the province's real cash deficit by next year without the need to deeply cut core social programs. The PC government, even if all their rose-coloured projections pan out, will keep Alberta in a cash deficit position well past 2012, contrary to their claims of being back in the black by that time. It should also be clearly understood that these proposed adjustments do not take into account the billions more in potential savings that would be achieved through much-needed systemic reforms to our public health care system and other high-cost government social programs as well as by negotiating a much fairer equalization arrangement with Ottawa, both of which this PC government has utterly failed to accomplish.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I would like to turn to the issue of this government's hidden deficit in more detail. This was talked about in question period today. The government of Alberta is claiming a \$4.7 billion deficit in 2010, but that is not the whole story. There is at least one large set of expenses that is not included in the budget deficit number. Total capital spending is projected to be \$7.2 billion, yet only \$4.4 billion in infrastructure spending is accounted for by the final deficit number. An additional \$2.8 billion of capital investment in government-owned assets is not included in the government's quoted deficit number. It says so right on page 18 of their own budget document. Therefore, the government of Alberta's true cash deficit is a shocking \$7.55 billion.

Perhaps I could show more proof. Besides the notation on page 18 I would also turn members' attention to page 67, where it specifically notes that the sustainability fund projected total from this year to next will decrease from \$15 billion to \$8 billion. That's a difference of \$7 billion that is going out the door. In addition, another \$1.5 billion in debt on top of that is also allocated in this budget. So that is \$8.5 billion going out that we are not bringing in. That does not equal the \$4.7 billion that the government is suggesting the cash deficit really is. There is a huge discrepancy there.

Now, I'm not saying that it's intentional or anything else, but I would hope this government eventually would admit that this year we are spending \$8.5 billion more than we are taking in, and we are financing it through the sustainability fund to the tune of \$7 billion and \$1.5 billion in debt. This is totally unacceptable to Albertans. There is no excuse for this.

While our budget proposals that I've talked about would reduce this cash deficit substantially to roughly \$2.88 billion, this PC government has been so fiscally irresponsible that it would be impossible to balance the books in cash terms without more aggressive cuts to public spending, which would not be prudent in today's market conditions and is something we would not recommend. I guess the question, Mr. Speaker, is: how did we get into this mess? Alberta has not been in a deficit position since Don Getty was Premier. Indeed, the market conditions in the world today are difficult, and many governments are struggling. We fully admit this and understand this. However, that is not a good enough excuse for the degree that we have fallen fiscally in this province.

It is clear that since the late Klein years and throughout the entire current administration this PC government has allowed spending to run completely out of control. I saw this consistent inability to restrain spending first-hand for two years. Every member of the government caucus knows full well that I along with others in the caucus that are still there today spoke out on this issue, me personally during my nomination race, the 2008 election, and for two years in the PC caucus. Finally, admittedly, I gave up on this caucus's ability to ever act in a fiscally responsible way. It was for that reason as well as the total lack of caucus democracy, which I spoke of in the media last month, that I left the PC caucus last month.

It was a frustrating experience. I could never seem to get the Premier's inner circle, including the Treasury Board president or the Deputy Premier, to understand the necessity of consistent, legislated fiscal restraint. Beginning in the 2003-04 budget year, if the government had merely restrained spending increases to the rate of inflation plus population growth, overall spending would have been approximately \$8.3 billion less today than currently projected. Furthermore, following this path of restrained spending would have resulted in much larger surpluses, which could have been used to build savings in the heritage trust fund. In fact, had both Mr. Klein during his last four years and the Premier today exercised fiscal prudence and held total government spending growth to the rate needed to keep up with inflation plus population growth, Alberta would today be looking at a budget surplus of \$3.9 billion – a surplus of \$3.9 billion – rather than a record deficit.

Mr. Speaker, despite this government's failing record there is still time to turn this ship around. There are still fiscal conservatives in that government caucus. I know that first-hand. I'd ask them to speak up as we go through these budget deliberations.

We can and must restore Alberta to strong fiscal health, and the Wildrose Alliance caucus has a plan for doing just that. First, we must get our current cash deficit under control and retired by next year. Piling up billions in debt on the backs of future generations to dull the pain of a self-inflicted spending hangover is the height of irresponsibility. So, too, is expanding the size of government entitlement programs to the point where the only way to adequately fund such is to raise taxes or increase debt on future generations.

The budget deficit can be dealt with in the short term by implementing some of the fiscally responsible strategy that we've noted. For example, as discussed, spread the capital budget from three years to over four and a half years, and then keep that budget line for infrastructure consistent with the rate of inflation plus population growth. We currently spend about two times – two times – more than the next closest province in Canada on infrastructure. We don't

need everything right now. We can wait another 18 months and be responsible to future generations. Bringing our level of capital spending down to slightly more than B.C., behind only Quebec and Newfoundland, would save future Albertans a great deal of inflation and unnecessary debt.

We also need to restrain health and education operational spending to a healthy and sustainable rate of increase, again being the rate of inflation plus population growth, at least until the time when spending in these areas falls more in line with other Canadian provinces. We're way, way out in front on that, and we're not getting the results that we need.

Over the long term the government of Alberta must begin to practise good old-fashioned fiscal restraint. Clearly, nonrenewable resource revenues are very volatile. In Alberta we have developed a reliance on these revenues to feed our spending habits. We need to reform our spending practices by, first, legislating a cap on year-over-year increases in government spending to the rate of inflation plus population growth. Instituting this measure, which has proven extremely effective in other jurisdictions, will ensure that spending is controlled through good times and bad while providing the funds necessary for successful core social programs and required infrastructure. It will also have the effect of curtailing the size and scope of government bureaucracy as departments look for innovative ways to provide more efficient and better services by reallocating existing resources rather than simply asking for more money in funding while perpetuating outdated and wasteful programs. In fact, if our federal and provincial governments of the day had controlled spending in this way starting in 2000, both would be running large surpluses this year despite being in the midst of a global recession.

I would hope that the hon. finance minister will do what he has repeatedly, over and over again, said needs to be done and what the Premier has even alluded to, and that is, in the case of the finance minister, to pass a legislated cap on spending. There is no legitimate excuse in this environment not to do that. [Mr. Anderson's speaking time expired]

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

Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for offering a five-minute question-and-comment period. Oh, my Lordy; three members. The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne, and then the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

**Mr. VanderBurg:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It was an interesting conversation that you just had, and I was listening. You talked about the Horse Racing Alberta piece. Many people don't understand that unless the horse-racing industry earns money, we don't get that money, and we don't get to keep our share of that money. It's based on an agreement where Horse Racing Alberta earns money, government keeps some, sends some back. I'd say to this member: are you going to say that the agreement that Horse Racing Alberta has with the government of Alberta should be broken, and then, in turn, we don't build the track in your riding and do that big investment in Airdrie? Is that what you're saying?

**Mr. Anderson:** What I'm saying is that being with the Solicitor General, who did a fantastic job in that department, one of the things I became aware of or looked into was this very issue. That \$25 million is actually not from receipts or anything like that. It's strictly VLT money that goes directly to Horse Racing Alberta. If we're going to start doing that, let's start funding every society and community organization doing that. That's a one-off deal that was made by the previous Premier. I don't think it's something that we should brag about.

3:30

**The Speaker:** I think I'd better recognize the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East first.

**Ms Pastoor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When you are speaking about that debt, have you included the \$100 million bond issue that will be coming out next week plus the interest that we aren't sure of what the percentage will be? Was that included in your comments?

**Mr. Anderson:** Yes, it was. That was part of the increased debt load that this government has been responsible for.

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

**Mr. Hinman:** Yeah. I was wondering if the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere had some other comments on nonrenewable resources and the impact that it would have on our long-term finances. Maybe he could expound a little bit more on that area.

**The Speaker:** Recognizing that other members want to participate as well, go ahead hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

**Mr. Anderson:** I would love to do that. Thank you very much for that offer. I would say that the second component of a long-term fiscal plan surrounds the need to reduce our reliance on volatile nonrenewable resource revenues. I think that we can do this through the implementation of an aggressive heritage fund savings strategy. If we cap spending to inflation plus population growth, revenues would begin to outstrip the newly restricted spending levels, giving us the ability to invest a substantial portion of the resultant budget surpluses into Alberta's heritage fund. As annual interest earnings from the fund increase, they will not only replace a reliance on nonrenewable resource revenues; they will also allow us to gradually begin lowering personal and corporate income taxes, thereby attracting new businesses, entrepreneurs, and skilled labourers to our province.

This kind of sustainable long-term fiscal planning will accomplish the goal of diversifying our economy and will leave our children with less dependency on nonrenewable resource revenues along with even greater opportunities than we enjoy today.

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

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you. I just wonder if in your debt calculations you took into account the \$250 million that was borrowed, I believe, from the Royal Bank. I may have the wrong financial institution, but I'd like to know if that was included in your debt calculations.

**Mr. Anderson:** It was. As we know, the government has gone from zero in this sort of debt financing when this Premier took over office to roughly \$6 billion is what the projection is in 2012, and that would be a part of that number. It's a staggering number. There is no excuse to have plunged our books back into debt. To saddle future generations with this debt load is just beyond irresponsible, in my view.

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

**Mr. Quest:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just a couple of questions. Canadian and U.S. governments, governments all over the world have been borrowing heavily to stimulate their economies and help

with the economic recovery. The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere proposes to do the opposite here. I'm just wondering if he would have any data to show what kind of devastation removing \$4.3 billion or \$7 billion or whatever he's decided the deficit is would have on the Alberta economy.

**Mr. Anderson:** That's a very interesting way of putting it. As you know, the province of British Columbia has a huge stimulus program going right now for the Vancouver Olympics. Our proposal actually just takes our infrastructure level down, actually still above that massive British Columbia stimulus program. We're not talking about massive cuts, hon. member, we're talking about being reasonable, not thrashing a massive amount of debt onto the backs of future generations.

**The Speaker:** Thank you, hon. members. We're now going to move on.

I'd now like to recognize the leader of the ND opposition, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to have this opportunity to respond to Budget 2010. This is a fire brigade budget because the Premier is scrambling to put out the very flames he fanned with his attack on public health care. Health care is an area where Albertans have little patience for meddlesome politicking. Our party has known this for years, as we've been telling the government so for just about as long. In fact, any good that may come from the health care system in Budget 2010 is due in no small part to the efforts of the NDP to mobilize Albertans against yet another attempt by yet another Progressive Conservative government to cut and privatize our health care system. After the shine of these funding announcements fades – and judging by this governments' track record, it will – Albertans will see that this government is committed to only one thing: hanging onto their tarnished reputation at all costs.

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

Budget 2010 sets a dangerous precedent of spending that, while temporarily beneficial to some industries, is unsustainable in the long-term. Rather than prudent fiscal planning, it represents a spending scramble aimed at placating Albertans who have been outraged by this government's irresponsible initiatives to disrupt our health care system. Once again, this Conservative government has presented Albertans with a fiscal plan that offers disproportionate benefits to wealthy individuals and corporations. It does nothing to address what many Albertans see as a revenue problem in the form of extremely low royalties and ongoing handouts to the oil and gas industry. The government has created a permanent financial squeeze by giving away tax revenues to profitable corporations and the wealthiest Albertans.

In 2006 the revenue from the income tax structure was approximately \$4.7 billion, \$5.5 billion lower than it would have been if the previous tax system had been in place. Alberta's deficit is currently projected to be \$4.7 billion, again something we could eliminate if we simply restored a progressive income tax in this province. Because this government has refused repeated recommendations to invest in the diversification of Alberta's economy, we have once again been presented with a budget that hinges on the predictability of the patently unpredictable revenue streams of oil and gas. Alberta has become overly dependent on volatile oil and gas revenues, particularly gas royalties. The failure to diversify our economy makes budgeting in Alberta even harder than it needs to be. As it is,

Budget 2010 contains questionable speculations on the strength of the Canadian dollar and banks on a rebound in natural gas prices despite economic forecasts that predict otherwise and a marked increase in natural gas reserves south of the border.

As with past budgets in this province Budget 2010 shows that the Conservative government has no plan to diversify Alberta's economy so that we may begin to rely once more on stable revenue streams. It is this kind of short-sighted gambit, that continues to force this government into positions it cannot possibly maintain, which has led to a perpetual string of broken promises for long-term funding initiatives. Budget 2010's plan to boost health care spending is just the latest in that string. The NDP has no faith that the long-term funding promises made in Budget 2010 will be kept, and I suspect many Albertans don't either. Mr. Speaker, the government's promises are simply unbelievable.

I can say this with confidence because the NDP is the only party to have travelled the province offering Albertans a chance to freely express their opinions and suggestions about health care reform. We're the only party to have put together a public document recording these sentiments, which we've called What Albertans Want. We were very successful in that campaign, Mr. Speaker, so successful, in fact, that the minister of finance has now begun to use the title of our report in his efforts to sell Budget 2010 to Albertans. Unfortunately for the government, there is one major problem with their attempt to adopt the title of our health report as their own: the Premier and his caucus don't actually know what it is Albertans want. Rather, they know that their efforts to privatize public health care in Alberta have failed yet again and that a backpedalling strategy may help stop the drubbing the Premier and his Tory party are taking in public opinion polls.

When it comes to understanding what Albertans really want, this government is making it up as they go, creating policy based on poll results rather than what is right for Alberta families. Take, for instance, the fact that neither the Premier, his finance minister, nor his health minister ever consulted openly with Albertans about health care reforms prior to implementing their ill-conceived plans. The NDP did hold such consultations and continues to do so. What we are hearing from Albertans, what the government fails to comprehend, is that in addition to protecting public health care, Albertans want a government that they can trust. The fact of the matter is, Mr. Speaker, that Albertans cannot and do not trust this Conservative government to protect public health care. The Progressive Conservatives in this province have broken too many promises too many times for people to believe that they will honour the commitments for long-term funding made in Budget 2010.

Granted, some good may come from this budget and from the government's decision to stop poking a pointy stick into the health care beehive at least for the time being, but it will have been financed on the backs of Alberta's most vulnerable and poor citizens. Budget 2010 is disingenuous in that it proposes paying for a questionable commitment to health care by cutting services to the homeless, to the unemployed, to vulnerable children, and to students. I don't think that's what Albertans want, Mr. Speaker.

**3:40**

Consider the \$36 million budget cut to the Children and Youth Services ministry. This includes a 7 per cent reduction in funding for programs aimed at child intervention. These programs are designed to identify children at risk of suffering dangerous and traumatic circumstances and to remove children from environments where they are being neglected or worse: physically, emotionally, or sexually abused. Mr. Speaker, this cut is perhaps the most cynical contained in Budget 2010, especially given the repeated tragic and,

frankly, embarrassing failures of this ministry to protect vulnerable children in care.

It was the NDP, Mr. Speaker, that identified this ministry's inability to ensure proper and timely reporting of the state of children in care. It was the NDP who made public the documented evidence of children in care being forced into face-down restraints and being placed in foster care environments where caregivers knew that children may have been sexually abused by other children. It was the NDP who made this House aware of the tragic circumstances that led to the death and hospitalization of children in the care of this ministry. Given all of this sadness and the obvious need for more oversight and better care, it is unacceptable that Budget 2010 should shave a single penny from child intervention programs. Bankrolling lofty promises for health care funding by stripping away the protection of children in care is shameful, and I don't think that's what Albertans are looking for.

Consider the \$112 million budget cut in the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs. Nothing could signal more clearly that this government has abandoned its 10-year plan to end homelessness. In fact, Budget 2010 represents a total commitment of less than one-third of the funding promised to achieve this objective. Programs designed to help the homeless make rent have been slashed from \$144 million last year to \$88 million this year and are falling to \$75 million next year. Coupled with the minimum wage freeze and a \$47 million cut to the Alberta Works social assistance program, cuts to the housing ministry will force more people out of their homes and onto the street. Mr. Speaker, we know that once people are forced onto the street, their next stop is often the health care system. This is yet another short-sighted cut that harms vulnerable people, and I don't think that's what Albertans are looking for.

Mr. Speaker, this government's hollow promises to fund health care also come at the expense of Alberta's workforce. Budget 2010 has taken \$87 million from the Ministry of Employment and Immigration, the effects of which may be far reaching. In addition to the hundreds of Albertans who will lose their jobs, thousands more will suffer from this reduction in income supports, health benefits, and job training programs. At a time when Alberta's economy is desperately struggling to stay afloat and following a year in which nearly 80,000 jobs were lost in this province, such cuts will cause unnecessary suffering for working families.

Working Albertans want help during a recession in order to go back to school, to upgrade their training, and to get back to work. Immigrants coming to this province to join our workforce rely on government supports to ensure that educational training is affordable. All of these programs are aimed at bolstering our economy by ensuring that out-of-work Albertans get back on the job and new immigrants can contribute to our workforce while still feeding their families. Cutting the very services that are designed to cushion our economy in tough times makes no sense, and I don't think it's what Albertans are looking for.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I must say that the NDP is at best skeptical about this government's promise for a long-term funding commitment to health care. There have been too many previous broken promises, and I think Albertans are skeptical for good reason. Their long-term promise to end homelessness has been a sham. This government's long-term commitment to fund the Green TRIP program has been a sham. This government's long-term promise to cap tuition increases to the rate of inflation is a sham. And their repeated promises to give Albertans the health care system they want have all been a sham.

Rather than show that the Progressive Conservatives truly understand what Albertans want, Budget 2010 makes clear the fact that this government remains prepared to say anything in order to

retain its grip on power. The Progressive Conservatives have a deplorable track record of broken promises. This gives Albertans little, if any, confidence in their latest promise for long-term, stable funding for health care.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans wanted a budget this year that showed a commitment to correct the mistakes of the past. They wanted to see an increase in health care funding, yes, but they certainly did not want it paid for by Alberta's homeless, our unemployed, our immigrant populations, and our vulnerable children. Moreover, they are justifiably skeptical that looking back five years in time from now, they will find that this government has kept its promise for predictable health care funding.

Mr. Speaker, this government has created an unsustainable situation primarily because it has walked away from billions of dollars in revenue that was paid when we had a fair and progressive income tax system in this province. But in order to benefit the wealthiest Albertans, they instituted a flat tax, that may cost this province's treasury \$5.5 billion a year or more. Moreover, this government has cut corporate income tax by over a third in the last eight years, and let's not forget that corporations pay income tax not when they're losing money but only on their profits.

Finally, as we've said many times in this House, this government charges the lowest royalties in the world. What's happened is that we have become overly dependent on natural gas revenues, which are, in my view, in permanent decline because of the dramatic increase in the reserves south of the border. So we're not going to see the high, high prices for natural gas that we have seen. The dependence on natural gas revenues or royalties is in fact going to create a permanent financial situation for this province that is going to hurt the ability of this government to deliver the services that Albertans want. Mr. Speaker, we should not have to lay off nurses every time the price of natural gas goes down, yet that's what's happening in this province because the government has failed to be responsible in looking after its revenues in the long run.

That underlines, I think, the kind of problem that they have when they create a fire brigade budget, running from one fire to another. This year it's health care. Next year it might be education. The year after that it might be the environment or children's services. We can't continue in this way. We have to do better. We can do better. If the NDP proposals were accepted in this province, if we had an NDP government that put proper fiscal measures in place, we could protect the very services that Albertans treasure. That's something this government has failed to do, and I think they will pay a price for it, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you very much.

**The Acting Speaker:** Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs.

**Mr. Denis:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just would like to ask the member a question. He talked about how his proposals would result in an increase in oil and gas royalties, an increase in income tax. What other taxes would he raise to go through all of these grandiose entitlement programs that he talked about?

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

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I find it very interesting that this hon. member talks about health care and public education as entitlement programs. I think it's very indicative of the mentality on the other side.

These are the birthrights of Albertans, Mr. Speaker, and for this minister, newly minted though he may be, to stand up and say that

these are just entitlements and the NDP wants to increase taxes in order to pay for them is disingenuous at best. We are talking about taxes that existed in this province under a Progressive Conservative government. A previous iteration under Premiers Lougheed and Getty was a little more balanced in its approach and believed that the very wealthiest in society should pay their share. This government has cut taxes but for the wealthiest people of this province, and those are the corporate tax and the flat tax.

Mr. Speaker, we did a little experiment at the time. We ran some numbers. We took a bus driver – and I picked a bus driver because I used to be one, an actual, live bus driver in Calgary, I might say – and Ron Southern, and we estimated the tax savings of those individuals under the flat tax when it was first brought in. Now, Mr. Southern's savings were substantial. He received a tax savings of \$60,000 according to the best estimates that we could make. The bus driver got about 50 bucks in tax savings on an annual basis. That illustrates very clearly the unfairness and the unbalanced nature of this government's tax cutting. They're cutting taxes on the wealthiest Albertans and on large corporations, and it is the poorest Albertans that have to pay for those cuts through cuts to their services.

So if you're unemployed and you want to take upgrading, they cut that program. You know, if you're unemployed and you want to get off welfare, they cut that program. They cut in half in this budget the number of new housing units that were going to be built, Mr. Speaker. So you can see how this Progressive Conservative government, in order to reward the wealthiest Albertans and the corporate sector in this province, will attack the poorest and most vulnerable, and they do it over and over and over again.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the hon. minister for his question.

3:50

**The Acting Speaker:** Standing Order 29(2)(a) is still available. The hon. Member for Strathcona.

**Mr. Quest:** Yeah. Just one question for the hon. member. Taxes are being held or reduced world-wide in an effort to stimulate the world's economy and again get everybody back on the road to recovery. Of course, the recovery has already started, so this has been quite successful. I'm just wondering if the hon. member can think of a country, a government, a society that's taxed its way out of a recession and has taxed its way to prosperity.

**Mr. Mason:** You know, Mr. Speaker, that's an interesting question. I'm going to use the example of my friend the former Republican Governor of Alaska, Sarah Palin, whom I met with a couple of years ago. She increased the royalties paid by oil companies operating in Alaska by a substantial amount. At a hundred dollars a barrel Alaska collects 66 per cent more per barrel than Alberta does, and that's before this so-called competitiveness review that we're going to see, where we're going to try and cut royalties back to the bone. So if a gun-toting, Bible-thumping Republican can do it, what's wrong with this crew?

**The Acting Speaker:** The hon. Member for Little Bow.

**Mr. McFarland:** Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I'm curious. I wonder what the rest of the story is on that member's comments about Alaska and Sarah Palin. As I understand it, yeah, they may have collected more on royalties, but they also didn't have property tax or personal income tax. So one kind of offsets the other.

My question to that member: can you explain for the benefit of my constituents your philosophy, then, on why government should be

spending taxpayer dollars to build housing for people that are supposedly low income or in need when a lot of my young constituents that are busting their butts with jobs have to try to build their own houses without any subsidy?

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

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

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

### Consideration of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech

Mr. Bhardwaj 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 8: Mr. Dallas]

**The Acting Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

**Mr. Hinman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to present the Wildrose Alliance's response to the government's Speech from the Throne. Before I go on, on behalf of the Wildrose Alliance caucus and our leader, Danielle Smith, I want to thank the Lieutenant Governor Norman Kwong for his service to the people of Alberta. I had the opportunity to be with him at many events, as have so many people. I have truly enjoyed the pleasure of his company. I even had the opportunity to travel with him and his gracious wife, Mary, a couple of times. He is an outstanding ambassador for the province as the Queen's representative. He has been a tireless promoter of Alberta's values and its people. Albertans admire his courage, his sense of humour, and his warm heart.

Mr. Speaker, we recognize that a Speech from the Throne is intended to set a vision for what the government wants to do for a period of time. We just wish that this government had articulated a vision that actually did something to eliminate the deficit and get the province's finances back in the black. We also recognize that the mechanics of the government's plan will come before this House in the form of legislation, committee work, and ongoing announcements. We'll be a constructive, respectful opposition caucus. We'll support the government when it does the right thing. We'll support the government when it honours its commitments and promises that are in keeping with what Albertans want, and we'll hold them accountable as our constituents expect us to do.

In that spirit, Mr. Speaker, let me share with you and the members of this House a vision for this province that is based on meetings that we have been holding for months and months, miles and miles, in community after community. It is a vision based on pride in this great province, a firm belief that we are all better off when we are truly free. Albertans have shown a real desire for change. They want and need accountability from their elected officials. Our vision is for a province where government is proud of business and the free-enterprise system because it helps us all enjoy a higher quality of life and the freedom that we cherish.

Our vision is for a province where government actually listens to the concerns, the hopes, and the dreams of Albertans. Let's not

forget, Mr. Speaker, that listening is far different from hearing, and that is something that many elected MLAs often forget. Our vision is for a government that actually represents the interests and values of Albertans instead of its friends and those connected through backroom operatives.

Our vision is for a government that puts agricultural policies in place to help those who have chosen to farm, those who have chosen to raise our food and those who have chosen to grow the products that we rely on. We want a government that gives the agricultural community the freedom to market and sell their own products as they see fit, to be able to have the freedom to do what is in the best interests of their family and business.

Our vision is for a government that understands that we serve at the pleasure of our constituents, the people who invest their hard-earned dollars in key services based on promises and commitments that we make here in this Assembly. Preston Manning used to say that the seats we represent belong to the people who have given us the honour to serve them here in this great Assembly. These seats do not belong to us as individual members.

In keeping with that spirit, Mr. Speaker, our vision is for a Legislature where every single member in this House is able to vote freely. If the people of my constituency don't support a particular policy or piece of legislation, I am elected by them and should be able to represent their interests first. Likewise, if I constantly do things that go against the wishes of my constituents, they should be able to gather signatures and have me recalled. Accountability to the people we represent should be every day, not just on election day, as this PC government likes it to be.

As we have tried to explain to you and to other members in this House, we also believe that a truly free House means that each member here must have the proper funding to do their job, to research important pieces of legislation, and to represent their own unique points of view. This should be a place where thoughtful and vigorous debate can take place even when we don't agree with our own party members or one another. That funding and the opportunity to participate should be afforded to every member even if your party has only one elected member.

Our vision is for a government that drives true health care reform instead of promising and passing the problem on with further delay and study. Access to a waiting list is not access to health care. There is so much we can do within the Canada Health Act to create efficiencies and savings that can be reinvested in front-line services, technologies that save lives, and medical research that helps make the diseases of today a thing of the past.

Our vision is for a province where municipalities receive long-term, sustainable sources of funding instead of having to go cap in hand to a government that will decide what the local priorities are. Those decisions should be left to locally elected officials.

Our vision is for a province where environmental stewardship goes hand in hand with economic development and where we can harness the potential of both. Albertans share a unique connection to the environment, the land and the water. We want to do everything we can to make sure that we teach our children and grandchildren the benefits of being good environmental stewards so they can have those special places that we enjoy today, that they are there for them, their children, and their grandchildren.

Our vision is for a province where people are not afraid to speak out over fear of losing a grant for their municipality or a government contract or even their position within the government. True freedom only exists when people can speak out. True freedom only exists when government listens and when members of the House are able to speak freely. To do this, all members must have access to proper resources. They need to have the ability to do their work for the

people and the views they represent. True freedom for Albertans can only be realized when the power is back in the hands of the voter through recall and other democratic reforms such as citizens' initiative referendums.

4:00

Mr. Speaker, we are living in a very competitive world. We cannot afford to drop the ball as the world struggles to recover from this credit debt fallout. It is true that we went into this recession better off than others, but that does not mean that we can continue with this reckless spending. We need a plan, and we need to prioritize our spending. We need to make the infrastructure plan public. Both the people and the municipalities need to know. Industry can plan, and the people can expect the projects to come online in a timely and orderly sequence. The yo-yo spending in infrastructure with unreasonable timelines has cost the taxpayers dearly. The on-again, off-again projects like the police academy in Fort Macleod are wrong. They've announced it. They need to follow through with their commitments.

What this government doesn't understand is that long-term, stable funding is essential. We made the cuts in the '90s and had this good fortune and discipline to control the spending, but the spendaholics have gotten their hands on the chequebooks and do not realize or acknowledge the fact that what we spend we must pay.

This is only a portion of what the Wildrose Alliance vision is for Alberta. I'll bring my comments to a close, but please be assured that the Wildrose Alliance will be here to support the government when it makes sense but will hold the government accountable when it goes off track. We hope that we are supporting them more often than not because that means they are in step with the real values of Albertans, not the imaginary values and priorities that are whispered into their ears by friends of this government. Mr. Speaker, we are here to represent the people we serve. It is time for this government to get it right. Albertans deserve nothing less.

**The Acting Speaker:** Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, I'll call on the next speaker. The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

**Mr. Hehr:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Before I get into discussing the merits of the throne speech, I would first like to thank the Lieutenant Governor, the Hon. Norman Kwong, and his wife, Mary, for five remarkable years of service to the Alberta people. On a number of occasions I have had the pleasure of having dinner with Mr. and Mrs. Kwong and got to know and appreciate first-hand their commitment to this great province.

Interestingly, my first brush with the greatness of the so-called China Clipper came in 1977 as a seven-year-old playing hockey for the Varsity White Warriors. On a chilly October evening we were playing a game of hockey on the outdoor community rink on Varsity Drive, right beside the Varsity Community Centre and next to the Varsity Acres school. Mr. Kwong's son played on the rival team from the Triwood Community Association. His son's name was Randy, and man, could that kid skate. Following our first game against Triwood on the open ice, I asked my dad who the really fast skater on the Triwood team was. My dad told me his name, which, as indicated, was Randy, and interestingly Randy went on to play for my junior hockey alma mater, the Calgary Canucks, and received a hockey scholarship to Harvard.

After we talked about what a great skater Randy was, my dad then asked me whether I saw the rather small, spectacled man standing watching the ice time in the corner of the rink. I said yes, and from

there my dad told me the story of the China Clipper, the story of how a small of stature, slight of build man who once played for the Edmonton Eskimos dominated the Canadian Football League with his passion and simple love of the game. Mr. Kwong was more than a football player. He ran a successful dry cleaning company, a successful real estate company, held many positions, including being president of the Calgary Stampeders organization and was a large part of the Calgary volunteer community.

More impressive than all of this, though, is the fact that over the seven or eight years of playing against his son, I can't remember a game where he wasn't present quietly in the corner of the rink overlooking the proceedings. To my memory he never missed a game.

Truly, the Lieutenant Governor is a great man, and again I would like to thank the hon. Mr. and Mrs. Kwong for their service to the Alberta people. They will be missed.

Moving on, let's discuss the throne speech. As you are aware in this House, this has been my third opportunity to listen to a Speech from the Throne delivered by this government. In fact, I think it's the 39th consecutive throne speech given by the Progressive Conservative government. Again, much like the last two throne speeches I have listened to, they have contained glowing reviews of the programs, policies, and enactments of this government. And why not? If they're not going to toot their own horn, who is? The truth is nobody because right now the people of Alberta are questioning whether or not this Progressive Conservative government of Alberta, or as my friend calls it, the socially regressive, fiscally irresponsible government of Alberta, is making decisions in the best interests of Albertans for the long run. Sadly, I believe the answer is no.

At the end of the day everything we do in this Legislature should be about building a healthy and vibrant life for ourselves and our children. As I see it, Alberta needs a few things to ensure that we live the best lives that we can and that our children live even better lives, and it is the government's job to help deliver those things. The government's throne speech failed to show any vision or direction but simply pretended that all was well.

The current government has been in power for over 40 years, and they pretend they've done great things. What is their true legacy? As the throne speech reminded us, yes, they paid off a debt, a debt that was incurred by them. Yes, the tax rate is relatively low. But what else is there, really? The answer is, unfortunately, not much.

This year Alberta will run another huge deficit. At this rate we'll eat through the entire sustainability fund. As much as they may claim that Alberta will continue to be debt free, these Alberta bonds that the throne speech lauded are nothing but debt. Make no bones about it; the government has returned Albertans to a position of debt and is well on its way to eating through our modest reserves.

A healthy and vibrant society cannot exist without a healthy and vibrant economy. In Alberta for the present term our economic welfare will be directly linked to the energy sector. It is essential that Alberta's energy companies are competitive and have the opportunity to make an honest buck. The throne speech spoke at length about Alberta's competitiveness. It spoke about innovation. It spoke about education and advanced technology. It repeated the same promises that Albertans have heard for years. It promised changes. But this government refuses to release its competitiveness review and tell us what those changes will be. I'll believe that the government is actually going to change things for the better when I see it, but I hope I see it soon.

Alberta's economy is hurting, and the government's constant tinkering with the royalty structure has done nothing but aggravate the effects of the recession. Having said that, the energy industry



has a responsibility to ensure that all Albertans share fairly in its prosperity. Yes, they must produce wealth, but they cannot shirk or avoid their environmental obligations.

The throne speech promised that Alberta's health care system would become "more patient focused." This begs the question of what it was focusing on if it was not the patient beforehand. The bottom line is that Albertans must have access to the best health care available. There will always be a push and a pull as to what the precise level of care should be. What I do know is this: it is a person's need and not their bank book that should determine their access to the system.

In looking closely at our system of health, the problem is not money. It is poor management. The government has and continues to throw Alberta's health care system into disarray, the latest with the creation of a superboard that no one asked for, a move with no publicly available study showing its necessity. Clearly, the superboard has been a colossal failure and a colossal waste of money.

The vitality of the energy sector, health care, and the education system are major Alberta issues. The government has a significant role to play in these areas. Let me make it clear that I do not believe that the best government is a government which governs least. It is not a question of big government or small government; it's a question of good government. I am committed to good government. It is clearly past the time for political and economic reckoning in this province.

I was born in 1969 at the Holy Cross hospital. For almost 40 years I've been fortunate to call Alberta my home. My life has been good, and I say that sincerely. I have very few complaints. I certainly hope my two nephews, Marshall and Jackson, will have the same opportunities I did. Government must understand that they have an obligation not only to the present but also to the future. Opportunities squandered are opportunities lost. I believe we still have time if we wish to take control of our future and ensure that my nephews and your children and grandchildren can continue to live in a province that is not only the envy of the rest of Canada but the world. We can do that.

#### 4:10

I sat through the throne speech thinking to myself that it all seemed too good to be true. Some of you might remember that last year I stood here and pointed out that the government's throne speech reminded me of the fictional paradise Shangri-La. This year is not much different. I couldn't help but think the government was just pretending that all was well. The government was pretending that there were few problems, pretending that those problems didn't exist and that the problems that did were just not this government's fault.

In fact, when I was thinking about giving this address to this august House, quite coincidentally a song came on the radio that I had not heard in quite some time. It was called *The Great Pretender*, that was originally done by The Platters and later on covered by Freddie Mercury. The song goes like this: oh, yes, I'm the great pretender, ooh ooh, pretending that I'm doing well, ooh ooh; my need is such, I pretend too much; I'm lonely, but no one can tell. It continues: oh yes, I'm the great pretender, ooh ooh, adrift in a world of my own, ooh ooh; I play the game, but to my real shame you've left me to dream all alone, ooh ooh.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to offer a response to the government's great fiction.

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

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

**Mrs. McQueen:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour to stand in the House today and reply to the Speech from the Throne. We all know that we have been faced with the most challenging economic circumstances since the Great Depression. For Alberta to be in the position it is today, ahead of all other jurisdictions in Canada, is truly a result of the hard work of all Albertans. It is important to remain optimistic in these times and keep thinking of the opportunities that lie ahead of us as we emerge from this economic turbulence.

I want to touch on a few issues that highlight our province's bright future, our competitive economic position, our clean energy future, and a health care system that is designed to meet the challenges of an aging population. Mr. Speaker, Alberta is well known for its competitive advantage for those who live and conduct business in our province. Alberta is truly in an enviable position when it comes to economic competitiveness. For example, we have the lowest tax regime in Canada. This is something our government values and is very proud of. We understand that taxpayers' dollars are best left in the hands of taxpayers. While other governments are raising taxes, it is our Premier that has made a pledge to all Albertans that under his watch there will be no tax increases. What this means is that Albertans will continue to benefit from paying no provincial sales tax, a low flat-rate income tax, and will continue to have the highest personal income tax exemption in Canada.

At the same time, Mr. Speaker, Albertans also benefit from the foresight of our government, particularly in that our province does not have any net debt. In fact, as many Albertans are aware and proud of, we have billions in cash reserves, savings, and other assets due to the hard work of all Albertans. It is this competitive economic environment which has provided a solid foundation which will lead Alberta to make a strong recovery from the global economic recession. It is this competitive edge that has brought so many opportunities to our province. In my constituency of Drayton Valley-Calmar alone I was pleased to host our Premier and our agriculture minister for the opening of the Alberta Rhodiola Rosea Growers Organization processing plant in October. We also had the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development at the Bio-Mile opening in Drayton Valley.

These are, of course, only a few examples. Folks are excited about the opportunities that await them in Alberta. It is also important to note that we are competitive in the resource sector. Alberta is richly blessed with important resources such as agriculture, forestry, and energy. This government is committed to ensuring that our resource sector continues to thrive, which will be reflected in Alberta's competitiveness review. This commitment is reflected in Bill 1, the Alberta Competitiveness Act. This legislation will ensure that Alberta remains as the most competitive jurisdiction in North America.

In addition to the prosperity of the resource sectors we will also work towards value adding these resources right here in our province of Alberta. I'm happy to say that found within my constituency is an innovative opportunity for the value-added sector. As I mentioned, the Drayton Valley Bio-Mile has received both federal and provincial government support because we believe in diversifying our economy. We know that it is an important step in the right direction for our province. The economic boost to the region surrounding Drayton Valley is incredible, and I look forward to seeing the benefits not only for the economy but for our environment and the forest sector as well.

Our government remains committed to supporting a world-class integrated petrochemical hub that will upgrade the raw materials from the oil sands before it is delivered to markets. It is our resource sector that will continue to attract investment and help meet the

energy demands of North America throughout the 21st century. However, clean energy is also crucial to this province's future. Albertans are proud stewards of our land, our air, our water, and this government will support their efforts. Energy conservation is one area where all Albertans can play a role. As parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Energy I look forward to working with the minister and several industry players to be involved in these important initiatives.

We also need to continue supporting efforts like advanced technology such as carbon capture and storage. Technology will play a major role in ensuring we meet our environmental objectives. It is technology like carbon capture that we can use here at home to reduce our GHGs while at the same time enhancing resource extraction, adding many years to fields like the Pembina field in my constituency, which equates to jobs and a return on the investment many times over. This serves a dual benefit of ensuring environmental responsibility and an economic advantage.

Mr. Speaker, right here in Alberta we have an innovative research and development sector that can advance technology of this nature. This is complemented by the fact that we will be able to export this technology to the rest of the world. Alberta has always led the way in environmental stewardship. Through clean energy incentives, stringent carbon reduction targets, and innovations like carbon capture and storage it is Alberta that is acting on climate change and not just talking about it.

Mr. Speaker, another issue that is of great importance to my constituents and, indeed, to all Albertans is health care. However, as the Speech from the Throne indicated, we need to achieve better results for the money we spend for all Albertans. For the monetary value we invest in our health care system, I believe all Albertans expect to get the care they need where they need it regardless of where they live. Over the past year we have made some significant changes to our health care system which will provide a solid foundation to build upon. I know that this government will continue to support and improve our health care system through its commitment to a stable five-year funding arrangement for health care.

This is important because with an aging population we will continue to see additional pressures placed upon our health care system. We need to ensure that our system is properly established to provide high quality of care for all Albertans and especially our seniors because they deserve to have the options to age in place together and not be separated, as my parents had to be after 50 years of marriage. That's why I'm proud to say we are committed to enhance the quality of seniors' care in Alberta.

This government has made considerable improvements in pharmaceuticals by lowering the price of generic drugs. We have also expanded the role of pharmacists in client care as a part of this government's strategy on pharmaceuticals. With the funds generated through the Alberta capital bonds, we will be able to improve and build even more seniors' residences to ensure that those who helped build this province receive the high-quality care they deserve and that they may stay together.

Mr. Speaker, I am so proud that our Premier has committed to ensuring a high quality of life for all Albertans. While the global economic realities that we face today challenge our resolve, the spirit of Albertans will continue to shine through. Through our competitive economic foundation, our clean energy future, and our world-class public health care system we can be assured that under the leadership of our Premier and this government we will continue to have a province that is the greatest place on earth to live, work, and raise our families.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I would like to take a moment to acknowledge and thank the hon. Lieutenant Governor, who has

served this province with integrity and passion and also a very good sense of humour. His service and Mrs. Kwong's will be forever remembered and greatly missed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

4:20

**The Acting Speaker:** Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

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

**Mrs. Sarich:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour and privilege to stand before the Assembly today and reply to the Speech from the Throne delivered by His Honour the Lieutenant Governor for Alberta. Before I begin expressing my thoughts about the Speech from the Throne, I would like to recognize the hon. Lieutenant Governor for his tireless, dedicated commitment to public service and personal passion for our great province. Over the past five years as Her Majesty's representative in Alberta the hon. Lieutenant Governor's exemplary and distinguished service has been greatly appreciated, valued, and will be wholeheartedly missed by many. His example remains, and he has set a standard for all of us in two crucial ways, by meeting challenges and capitalizing on opportunities.

Mr. Speaker, those are the two things that we need to do in building the next Alberta in the coming years. To say that Albertans and their government are facing a time of considerable challenge is to seriously understate the case. This is unquestionably a time of substantial volatility, complexity, and uncertainty in so many aspects of our lives. In terms of the economy together we have been working hard to help Albertans weather the first great financial storm of the 21st century, and it has hit hard. The winds may have diminished, but we honestly don't know for sure that the storm has passed.

Our neighbour to the south and our biggest trading partner is at this time considering a proposal for a budget deficit of one and a half trillion dollars, a figure that almost defies understanding and one that has made many people justifiably nervous. There is not the slightest doubt that if our friends to the south can't effectively work their way through the daunting economic and financial problems, our challenges are going to become more complicated.

Much of this economic volatility comes from the fact that Alberta is deeply embedded in an increasingly globalized and competitive economy. When international natural gas prices recently fell dramatically because of new technologies for recovery combined with an economic downturn, Alberta could not avoid being affected. Mr. Speaker, that is simply not going to change in the years to come. By all accounts these international forces are going to continue to shrink our world, and Albertans will either be buffeted by these forces or will emerge to find ways to benefit from them. That is the critical point. We need to have a deep understanding of the changing landscapes around us, and we have to find the opportunities that are embedded in these challenges. Make no mistake: there are opportunities in abundance.

Right now efforts of creating global strategies are more apparent than ever. As we are setting directions and discussing and weighing options, in the booming economies of India and China entrepreneurs and supportive governments are looking for and finding ways to profit from changing situations in the midst of all this volatility and uncertainty. Around the planet countries such as Brazil, Russia, and new European member states also have emerging economies, and together over the long term they could be the future drivers of global demand. Mr. Speaker, with the assets and advantages of this province there is simply no reason why the people of Alberta should not be leading the way in taking advantage of those opportunities,

developing effective competitive strategies, and improving the quality of lives in the process.

We are the only major political jurisdiction on this side of the world that has the ability to see our way through the worst economic circumstance since the Great Depression of the 1930s yet not saddle our children and youth, including future generations, with a debt they played no part in making. We may experience some short-term inconveniences, Mr. Speaker, in regards to our standard of living. However, all our resources and our people have allowed us to become not only a debt-free political jurisdiction in the western hemisphere but one of the few that has cash reserves in a sustainability fund to draw upon.

Also, there is no doubt that people will no longer accept a trade-off between economic advancement and the integrity and well-being of our environment, and we need to seize the opportunity to lead the way in that regard. We need to ask ourselves a key question. Why should Alberta not be leading the way in finding the methods of meeting energy needs in the ways that are consistent with the long-term health of our communities and planet? Why should we not be the ones who benefit from the inevitable profits that will flow to the jurisdictions which develop these approaches, that we know will be coming because the world is increasingly demanding them? The answer, Mr. Speaker, is that Albertans are in a perfect position to lead the way. Albertans have the expertise, the experience, the powerful, resilient, and adaptable entrepreneurial and enterprising spirit which leads us time and time again toward greater economic growth and stronger prosperity.

This is the lifeblood, Mr. Speaker, of our local economies that we value and are so proud of, which was built over the years and continues to lay a strong foundation for years to come. We have a government that knows how to respond, add value, and be supportive and knows when to stay out of the way and let the hard-working hands of the people of our province do what they are capable of achieving. These key principles will continue to serve us well as challenges are presented during these tough and turbulent times. Also, through the strong leadership of our Premier we will continue to build on the many strengths of this remarkable province.

Mr. Speaker, our province's strengths and assets are enormous, but it is essential to recognize that they are grounded in the diversity of the gifts and talents of our people. In a time of unrelenting globalization the fact that Alberta's people come from every corner of the globe is increasingly a major part of our unique advantage. The people who have come to this province are by definition risk takers, or they would have stayed where they were born. It is precisely this risk taking that is going to be essential in building the next Alberta.

It has become part of conventional wisdom to say that ingenuity, innovation, and entrepreneurialism will be the key to our success now and into the future, and in this case conventional wisdom has it right. Those things will require above all else a first-rate system of lifelong learning founded in a strong public education system that takes seriously the central task of developing that potential of every one of our children, youth, and adult learners. It is the foundation for a prosperous, inclusive, and democratic society, and we should be unrelenting in our commitment and investment in this regard.

Fortunately, Mr. Speaker, Alberta is building on a strong foundation, but we need to do more if we are to ensure that the unique gifts and talents of every child and youth are fully developed. We are fully committed to doing so, given that education remains a top government priority.

In addition to a well-educated population, we want and need healthy people. Mr. Speaker, the opportunities in these areas of health and learning are among the most promising strategies for the

years ahead. If we identify wise approaches to health promotion and prevention of disease and illness, we can save enormous amounts in our health care system and at the same time have far healthier individuals, families, and communities. Improvements in health directly support increases in education attainment, labour productivity, and economic growth. Healthy workers live longer, are more productive, and are less likely to be absent from work due to illness. Mr. Speaker, we need a comprehensive approach to health and learning, and I believe we are firmly headed in that direction.

Also, we need to be thoughtfully engaged in building the next Alberta for the foundation is strong to build upon. The future is unwritten, and I am proud to say that the people in our province together with this government are going to meet the challenges as presented and with confidence will capitalize on all the opportunities.

Mr. Speaker, as the people's representative for Edmonton-Decore I have never been more hopeful about our province and its future. It is truly an honour and a privilege to join hands with Albertans to create the next chapters of our great province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Acting Speaker:** Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

4:30

**Mr. Doerksen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm privileged to rise today and respond to the Speech from the Throne that was presented in this House last week. I would like to commend the hon. Lieutenant Governor for delivering this speech and providing us with a vision for this upcoming legislative session. I would like to thank His Honour for his valuable service to this province. I am pleased and honoured to represent the constituency of Strathmore-Brooks and would like to take this opportunity to thank my constituents for their continued support and their faith in allowing me to represent their interests in this House.

Mr. Speaker, I concur with much of what my colleagues have said in terms of the priorities and expectations voiced on behalf of their constituencies. These are shared by many in Strathmore-Brooks as well. Of course, I would like to add some comments of my own. Again, I would like to thank His Honour for presenting a speech that I believe resonates with many of my constituents in Strathmore-Brooks in that he has enumerated the challenges we face with optimism and direction for the future, determined to emerge from these difficult times even stronger than before.

In my constituency, Mr. Speaker, as in every region in this province, access to health care services is a priority. My constituency is served by three local hospitals in Brooks, Strathmore, and Bassano. I'm encouraged by this government's commitment to improve the delivery of health care services all across this province. Secure and stable funding and a vigorous focus on better performance in key areas such as wait times and access are important to my constituents. There is an urgent need to restore obstetric services to the Brooks hospital. Not only are families facing the cost in convenience and rise of risk of extra travel, but services in outlying areas are also strained by higher than anticipated patient numbers. This is a situation where Albertans deserve and expect better and one that I am confident will be resolved in the near future.

Mr. Speaker, I want to acknowledge the important contribution of our health care professionals to our communities. Certainly, without their dedicated service to our system and to Albertans our health care system would not be what it is today. We appreciate their dedicated service.

The completion of the new Sagewood garden in Strathmore later this year will include 60 new assisted living spaces for seniors and 40 seniors' affordable housing units providing care options close to home for many seniors in the Strathmore area. This initiative is one that is very important to my constituents.

Mr. Speaker, His Honour has focused our attention on the importance of improved competitiveness in a global economy. Improved competitiveness is important to attract and sustain investment in both the energy and agricultural sectors in this province. These two sectors, energy and agriculture, are the two most significant drivers of the economy in my constituency, and both have suffered losses in these tough economic times. The results of the competitiveness review are important to my constituents involved in the energy service sector, who count on Alberta's stability as a good place to invest.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 1, the competitiveness review, sends a signal that is important to industry and entrepreneurs in this province. Every day Albertans are impacted by the cost and inconvenience of excessive regulation: energy, agriculture, health care, education, transportation, environment, food service. Every jurisdiction in this province can benefit from the improved performance a more appropriate regulatory regime will deliver. I say that with confidence from discussion with my colleagues, who have experience in a broad range of these areas as well. That is not to say that we abandon our high regulatory standards, but I'm encouraged that this government can and will deliver improved efficiency by reducing excessive and ineffective regulation, and I'm motivated by the resolve my colleagues share to ensure that we deliver in this area, where the rubber hits the road, so to speak. My constituents are looking for common-sense solutions to complex problems, and I believe that smart regulation delivers on that concept.

The principle of competitiveness is important to Alberta taking its rightful place in Canada and the world. As government does its part to build the framework for greater efficiency, Albertans will succeed in domestic and international markets. This matter of competitiveness is also very important to agricultural producers in my constituency. Beef producers, in particular, have been burdened with increased costs of excessive regulation. Canada has an international reputation as having one of the very best animal health and food safety production systems in the world, and it is important to Alberta producers that we maintain that. However, I believe that regulatory scrutiny could also deliver some cost efficiencies to livestock producers as well. I'm pleased to see this government addressing this important initiative of improved competitiveness, and I look forward to working as part of a team, led by our Premier, to ensure that we deliver in this area.

To quote His Honour, Mr. Speaker: "Our world may have changed, but our people have not. They remain hard working and innovative, entrepreneurial and compassionate, and, most of all, confident about our province and its future." That reflects the attitude and spirit of my constituents as well. I'm thinking of small business owners who have stretched their resources to keep as many people working as possible through these difficult times and of the rig and oilfield service workers who are working less hours at reduced pay to make ends meet, employers and employees working together to weather difficult economic times. I'm thinking of health care professionals who have brought forward proactive and innovative suggestions to deliver seniors' care and restore obstetrics care to our communities through Alberta Health Services' Action Your Ideas initiative, people working together to solve problems.

Mr. Speaker, the strong fiscal position this province enjoys is also reason for optimism. Alberta's low tax rate is good for individuals and companies. The opportunity to draw on the \$17 billion

sustainability fund at a time when most jurisdictions are increasing their debt puts Alberta at a distinct advantage into the future. Timely investment in important infrastructure projects keeps many Albertans working, meets the needs of a growing population, and helps ensure ongoing efficiency. Projects like water systems and fire halls, that support municipalities, can facilitate future growth. Community halls and sports facilities can enhance the quality of life in the communities of Strathmore-Brooks. I think the new Brooks centennial arena, which will celebrate a grand opening next Saturday, February 20, a project that has been ongoing for a number of years, is a delight to see completed.

**Mr. Rodney:** Are you going to sing *O Canada*?

**Mr. Doerksen:** I could do that, my colleague.

Mr. Speaker, as I reflect on His Honour's speech and the positive contribution our Lieutenant Governor has made to this province, I am optimistic about our future, optimistic about the opportunity we have, building on past successes, to establish the framework that will ensure continued success in the future. This House is about people, people who want to create opportunities for success, people who want quality and efficient health care services and safe, secure communities for their children.

I look forward to this legislative session and look forward to working with all of you toward the future success of Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Acting Speaker:** Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

**Ms Pastoor:** Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to ask the member opposite actually a couple of questions if I might. I wonder if you could explain and perhaps use examples of how we can cut down red tape. One of the areas that is particularly of concern to me is people who are doing self-managed care for persons with developmental disabilities. What has happened is that the paperwork has increased and increased and increased, and to me that's red tape. So perhaps you could explain if that's going to be looked at.

Then the other thing was on the results that we get from our livestock. Do you or do you not sort of support the COOL, which would open up some very strong niche markets for Alberta beef?

4:40

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

**Mr. Doerksen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for those questions. I think you raise some good points, particularly with regard to the regulatory burden and the reduction of red tape. I think that's a matter where every member of this House could probably tell some stories as the member across the way has. We all have individual experiences where we'd like to see red tape reduced. I think that that's a very practical application as a part of what I see us addressing through this review of regulations in a broad range of areas. Certainly, with regard to the health care example that you've raised, I think there's opportunity to address those types of things in a whole range of areas.

With regard to the livestock question you raised and the matter of COOL legislation down in the United States, I think there are opportunities for niche market development. Certainly, the livestock industry has addressed that by trying to take advantage of niche opportunities in the U.S. and domestically as well, but there's no question in my mind that border restrictions in North America are inappropriate. Where they increase costs of production, they're

unnecessary because we have very similar standards with regard to animal health and food safety. We need to do whatever we can to ensure that borders are open in North America, and access to other markets is based on sound science, not political initiatives, which we know is the case very often. This particular piece of legislation is difficult for Alberta producers.

**The Acting Speaker:** Any other members wish to comment? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

**Ms Pastoor:** Thank you. If I might just carry that conversation forward. One of the areas that I look at when I think of COOL and some of the things they are doing is in terms of food safety, and I look at labels. I've become a label reader. When I look at labels, I have absolutely no idea where that beef has come from. In fact, we know that beef is labelled coming from the States into Ontario, but in fact it's Alberta beef. So it sort of goes this way, but they have no idea. I'm sure that if their choice was to eat corn-fed American or barley-fed Canadian, I think their choice would probably be barley-fed Canadian, but how are they going to know if it isn't labelled?

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

**Mr. Doerksen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The fact of the matter is that in most countries around the world origin labels are the standard in beef production. With regard to the movement of beef in North America the fact that beef comes up into eastern Canada at times is partly a matter of the market. My goal would be to have Alberta beef and Canadian beef producers – and they do – sell to the highest bidder at every opportunity, and that implies that we have open access to markets.

The matter of origins of beef. There's a whole set of initiatives to differentiate product, and country of origin labelling is not the only one. More successfully, often, are brand products that come with a guaranteed standard. I think that's a more effective way of marketing product, whether that goes into the U.S. or into eastern Canada.

**The Acting Speaker:** Standing Order 29(2)(a) is still available. Seeing no one, the hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

**Mr. Campbell:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm excited to rise today and join my colleagues in supporting the Speech from the Throne as I'm excited to share with you the concerns and hopes of my constituents in West Yellowhead. His Honour the Lieutenant Governor's words filled me with renewed confidence for the future and clearly painted a picture about where we are today and where we should be going.

Before I dive into the merits of the speech itself, I would first like to take this time to thank His Honour for both his words and his years of dedicated service. In my mind the Speech from the Throne centred on the need to maintain a balance between economic development and care for those most in need. After all, this is the same balance that has guided Alberta for years, and it is one that has resulted in Alberta being one of the most enviable jurisdictions in the world.

Mr. Speaker, to this end, I would like to talk about two industries that are important not only to the economy of my constituency of West Yellowhead but to the province as a whole. I speak, of course, of forestry and coal mining.

Now, it is true that the forestry sector has been negatively impacted in recent years. We all know the effects of issues like softwood lumber and the mountain pine beetle. To this end, I am pleased that the Lieutenant Governor confirmed our commitment to

combatting the pine beetle not only for the impact it has on the forestry sector but for the damages it causes to our world-class parks system.

In addition, I am also excited about Bill 1 and the development of the Alberta Competitiveness Act, which I believe will help address the pressures facing this important industry. After all, if we can ensure that Alberta remains competitive on the international stage, we can ensure that Alberta's forestry sector remains internationally viable.

We can also ensure that Alberta's forest industry has access to markets it needs to sell its world-class products. This is why I am pleased to hear His Honour's mention of creating a western economic partnership. Mr. Speaker, this partnership proposes to include the provinces of Alberta, British Columbia, and Saskatchewan and would create the largest free trade and investment market in Canada. In addition, these three provinces would work together on a joint trade mission to the eastern Asian markets. The potential benefits this mission has to Alberta's forestry sector are staggering. These are large and developing economies, and as they expand, they will need wood products and building materials. If we can get in on the ground floor in these economies, the economic benefit to the forestry sector could be impressive.

The second key industry I would like to talk about is one that I have considerable experience with, and that's coal. The issues confronting the coal industry are not market related but, rather, deal with the environment. That is why I'm pleased to hear the Lieutenant Governor mention Alberta's amazing technological advances in environmental management, most notably in carbon capture and storage, or CCS. Mr. Speaker, CCS has many potential benefits to Alberta's coal industry. With this technology in place not only would Albertans have access to an affordable source of energy but a source of energy that is mindful of its carbon emissions. Compounding this, with CCS in place the emissions from coal production could be used to make conventional oil and gas recovery more effective. CCS is truly an accomplishment Albertans should be proud of, and I'm glad that His Honour mentioned it.

Mr. Speaker, in addition to highlighting his commitment to maintaining and expanding our key industries, I'm also excited that the throne speech addressed our commitment to maintaining care for those in need. Specifically, I applaud our government's commitment to seniors. Not only this, but I'm happy that we've created a system where every Albertan can invest in the welfare of its aging population while earning a financial return. I'm speaking, of course, of the introduction of Alberta capital bonds.

As His Honour stated, capital bonds will only be available in Alberta and only to Albertans, and all the proceeds raised through the sale of these bonds will be used to build accommodations for Alberta's seniors. This could include continuing care and supportive living facilities. Mr. Speaker, this is a great idea. We are creating a system that recognizes that Alberta's population is aging; we are creating a system that realizes that as Albertans age, they require different levels of care and different facilities; and we are creating a system that supports our past while at the same time allowing us to save for the future. This is an example of the kind of leadership that recognizes that even though the economic situation may change, the needs of people do not.

Mr. Speaker, I would again like to thank His Honour for his encouraging words. I would like to thank him for the recognition he has given to two key industries not only in my constituency but in Alberta as a whole, forestry and coal. I would like to thank him for highlighting this government's commitment to those in need, specifically our seniors.

In my mind, the strength of Alberta has always been measured in how it addresses the needs of a world-class economy while at the same time providing care to its vulnerable citizens. Mr. Speaker, the Speech from the Throne highlighted this strength and, in my mind, painted a clear picture of the path Alberta will take to maintain its prosperity.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Acting Speaker:** Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

**Mr. VanderBurg:** I appreciate the member's comments. In your riding, like in mine but especially in your riding, there is an abundance of coal and opportunities for coal in the future energy business and others. How do you see the coal business developing in your riding and my riding?

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

**Mr. Campbell:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I think that, you know, there are a number of projects going on. As we know, we do have an abundance of coal. Under the current mining methods a lot of it's not economically feasible. But, of course, the Swan Hills project, for example, where we're drilling down a thousand metres and bringing syn-fuels out of the ground and actually having a very small footprint is, I think, a great future for the industry. Of course, I look in my riding along the eastern slopes of the Rockies, where we've mined at Cardinal River and Gregg River. There are still coal reserves there. They're down deep, but we know that there's lots of methane gas in that area. I think that through some of the new technologies that are taking place, it's going to make those areas viable again to go back and mine but, again, with a very small footprint and also create jobs and bring money into the government coffers.

4:50

**Mr. VanderBurg:** Thank you for that answer. I think it's interesting for people back home to understand that they have an MLA that understands the coal industry but also an MLA that understands the forest industry.

I wanted to know a little bit about your views on some of the industries in your communities and mine that are so affected by the pine beetle. What do you see over the next year? Especially coming out of the throne speech, there was a little mention about pine beetle. What are you projecting as opportunities because of an abundance of fibre that may hit our ridings?

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

**Mr. Campbell:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, as the Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne said, our ridings depend on forestry. We have some of the largest FMAs between the two of us in all of Alberta. With the mountain pine beetle, we have areas where up until last summer we had no pine beetle, and they're now being affected, and it causes great concern in the industry. But with the wood I think we have three options. One, we just leave it alone. The second one is that you burn it. The third one, I think, is that you cut it and you make use of it. In talking to a number of the forest industries in both our ridings, I think there are great opportunities for biofuels. I know that in talking to a number of the forest industries, they're looking at that. It's a way to use the wood that's there now but also give them the chance to diversify their industry.

I think that, you know, we have to look at the tree as a whole tree, not just a two-by-four. For example, I'll talk of Foothills Forest

Products in Grande Cache, which I'm very familiar with. One of their biggest products right now is wood pellets. You know, they're doing their conventional two-by-fours and their panelling, but their waste they're turning into wood pellets. Right now the only thing that's keeping that mill going is their wood pellet operation, where they're selling not only in Canada and the U.S. but also into Europe and using wood pellets for not only wood-burning stoves but also, which I found interesting, for horses. In a lot of the European market they're actually using the wood pellets instead of hay to keep their barns clean.

I think that there are tremendous opportunities in the wood industry, and I think that the industry understands that. I think that with the work that we're doing at the provincial level and also the work that the federal government is doing in assisting the forest industry, there is a bright future there for them. We just have to make sure that we work with the industry and reduce some of the regulatory red tape that they're facing right now and make sure that we streamline the plan so they can get the business done.

**Mr. VanderBurg:** Another project that you didn't have an opportunity to talk about was the resource road program. Again, it was very lightly touched upon in the throne speech. I know that important to your community of Grande Cache and to my community of Whitecourt is to try to provide another transportation link. You know, it's a great project that our constituencies are working on together to have that link complete between the ANC haul road, maybe, and Grande Cache but also a great opportunity for tourism and a great link that we can get our communities working closer together on snowmobile issues, on trail rides. Just wondering how you see that program, the resource road program, may help to link our communities, finally.

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

**Mr. Campbell:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Like I say, it was touched on very lightly, but I think the natural resource road program is going to be very beneficial to all of northern Alberta. I mean, myself and the hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne are at the southern tip of the NADC zone that I look after as chair. I think that the opportunities that this is going to offer to the north – I mean, one of the biggest problems we have in the north is getting product to market. We've had a number of issues with CN Rail, had a number of discussions with them. Also, I think that the work that the oil industry and the forest industries are doing together, where, again, they're looking at using one road and reducing the footprint, goes a long ways in making sure that the industries stay viable and look after the environment.

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

**Mr. Quest:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to rise today and respond to the Speech from the Throne, delivered so graciously by our Lieutenant Governor, His Honour Norman Kwong. I would also like to add my thanks to His Honour for his dedication in preserving and enhancing the traditions, heritage, and character of our province as Lieutenant Governor over the past five years.

Mr. Speaker, the Speech from the Throne highlighted many of this government's priorities, and at the conclusion of this inspirational speech I felt strongly that the priorities of our government echo those of myself, my constituents in Strathcona, and all Albertans. Alberta's fiscal advantage, the economy, health care, safe communities, and the environment are topics that all Albertans deem important, and these are issues that our government will continue to address.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta's fiscal position has drastically improved since the early 1990s. In 1993 our provincial debt was approaching \$23 billion. Since 1993 our province's fiscal position has improved by almost \$50 billion.

**Mr. Rodney:** How much?

**Mr. Quest:** Fifty billion dollars improvement.

I commend our government for its dedication to improving our fiscal position. However, I'm most proud of how this was achieved. We have accumulated substantial cash reserves while our tax rates are the most competitive in Canada, even in the absence of a provincial sales tax. With our strong fiscal situation and tax advantage Alberta is poised to emerge from these difficult economic times stronger than ever before.

Two things come to mind when I think about Alberta's current situation: our government's planning and foresight and the hard-working, innovative citizens of this province. Boom periods do not last forever, especially here in Alberta, where we have one of the most volatile revenue streams in North America. The price of natural gas, oil, and the exchange rate can fluctuate, causing major swings in our revenue stream. The government has recognized this and saved money during the boom years, the bulk of which was put into our sustainability fund.

This type of forward thinking is not foreign to me. In a past life I owned a small General Motors dealership, before I was MLA for Strathcona. Traditionally in our business January and February were very slow months. We always planned for these fluctuations in our sales by keeping enough cash on hand to keep our staff working through the late winter months until sales picked up in the spring, so we didn't have to lay off our skilled staff, we didn't have to jeopardize their families, and we were always in a great position in the spring to continue to grow our business, and grow it did.

Over the past year our government's revenue has declined, but we were prepared for this. The \$17 billion saved in the sustainability fund serves as a cushion for declining revenues. Furthermore, because of our fiscal responsibility our government can continue to uphold ambitious capital plans and continue to invest in our province. These capital plans are constructing public infrastructure projects that will benefit Alberta in the future while stimulating our economy by sustaining tens of thousands of jobs around our province.

One initiative that will fund these infrastructure projects is the sale of Alberta capital bonds. Mr. Speaker, the purchase of these bonds allows Albertans the opportunity to invest in their province. Our triple-A credit rating is a testament to years of fiscal prudence, and Alberta capital bonds will be backed by our strong credit rating, thus one of the safest investments that Albertans can make. I commend the Premier for allowing Albertans the opportunity to make such a secure investment in their province. Investing in Alberta capital bonds will be a show of support and pride for our citizens, especially given the infrastructure projects that they'll support.

Mr. Speaker, our demographics are changing. In 2011 there will be over 400,000 seniors living in Alberta. By 2021 there will be over 600,000. Our government has made it a priority to protect vulnerable Albertans, and that's exactly what Alberta capital bonds will achieve. The sale of capital bonds will be used exclusively for building accommodations for our senior citizens. Our senior citizens have been instrumental in building this province. They've instilled the qualities of hard work and entrepreneurial spirit and respect for our province in our generation. They are the foundation of Alberta, and our government recognizes that these outstanding Albertans deserve to live comfortably in the communities that they helped build.

Mr. Speaker, our low taxes and provincial savings have also allowed our government to continue to support health care in Alberta. Our government's goal is to have a health care system that is among the best not only in Canada but in the world. I firmly believe that we can achieve this as our government has taken a focused approach to moving towards this goal.

**5:00**

One measure that our Lieutenant Governor spoke of during the throne speech is the Minister's Advisory Committee on Health. Through public input the advisory committee created a number of principles that our provincial health system should follow. They include putting people and their families at the centre of their health care, being committed to quality and safety, ensuring equitable access to timely and appropriate care, and focusing on wellness and public health, to name a few. These recommendations will help formulate a new Alberta health act. I'm particularly excited about this development because my constituency, Strathcona, and all Albertans will be consulted in the development of their health care system. I commend the government in their efforts to involve Albertans, to allow citizens to take an active role in the development and improvement of our health care system, a system that's accountable to all Albertans.

Another area of the throne speech that piqued my interest, along with, I'm sure, the interest of many of my constituents, dealt with building caring, safe communities around Alberta. Mr. Speaker, Alberta is comprised of thousands of communities, and to use an old adage, we're only as strong as our weakest link. To this end, I was enthused to hear that our government will surpass their goal of creating 14,000 new child care spaces. I was also enthused to hear that government will be creating 11,000 new affordable housing units over the next few years as we move towards our goal of eliminating homelessness in Alberta in 10 years. Given the dedication of leadership of our Premier I know this goal will be attained. These initiatives display the emphasis that the government places on enhancing Alberta communities, and I know that my constituency, Strathcona, and all Albertans are looking forward to continued efforts to ensure vibrant communities throughout the province.

While strong, caring communities are important to Albertans, recent changes in the global economy have also been weighing on the minds of my constituents. Our government has stressed that we need to continue to focus our efforts on becoming increasingly competitive in the global economy and providing Albertans with opportunities for training and education. These initiatives will be vital to the future prosperity of our province as Albertans' knowledge and skill sets will be in sync with those needed to thrive in the evolving global economy.

Mr. Speaker, I spoke earlier of the government's foresight in preparing for turbulent economic times, and I'm enthused to see the government's foresight in preparing for a changing global economy. Alberta's recent increase in population is a testament to the opportunities that are available in our province. In this changing economic climate it's imperative to provide opportunities to Albertans so they may learn the skills needed to keep Alberta competitive for years to come. While Albertans continue to enhance their skill sets, it's the job of our government to ensure that we are continuing to create value-added opportunities and foster greater contact with new and existing trading partners.

Examples of industries that will benefit from these commitments are the agriculture and agrifood industries. Our agricultural industry is vital to the economic health of our province. We need to separate Alberta from other provinces and countries by making these

products competitive in new, previously untapped markets, and this is exactly what our government is planning to do. I know that my constituents in Strathcona who work in the agriculture and agrifood industry are excited to embrace these new markets and opportunities that will surely benefit their business and the province.

In addition to the agriculture industry many of our constituents work in the energy sector. Mr. Speaker, the Lieutenant Governor said during the throne speech that the best days in Alberta's energy story are yet to come. Under the leadership of our Premier I wholeheartedly agree. Alberta continues to be a leader in both renewable and nonrenewable energy and is poised to continue to embrace this leadership role for years to come. Our government is committed to attracting investment in the energy sector while also creating new technologies and protecting the environment.

Surely there are challenges that face our government along with the energy sector in extracting our natural resources in an environmentally sensitive manner. Through a joint effort we have limited the environmental impact of oil sands extraction thus far, but we know that new challenges await us with respect to this process. Through continued investment in research and technology we will be prepared to face these challenges, reduce emissions, and return the land to its natural state. Our Premier is fully committed to environmental stewardship, and I'd like to thank him for his efforts and his leadership in this vital area.

Mr. Speaker, the Speech from the Throne served as yet another reminder of why I'm proud to be an Albertan and why our citizens have reason to be optimistic for the future. We were prepared for the current economic downturn and will emerge as a global leader and a stronger, more united Alberta. The economy has peaks and valleys, but Albertans' values along with our government remain constant: a dedicated work ethic, perseverance, and a sincere, devoted commitment to fostering continued growth in our economy and a sense of belonging in our communities.

Thank you.

**The Acting Speaker:** Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

**Ms Pastoor:** Yes. Thank you. The member has spoken about the agriculture in his area, and I'm certainly aware of some of the excellent agricultural land that they have in that area. Are there any conversations around the fact that some of this agricultural land should be protected only for agriculture?

Then the other thing, I think, that is in his riding as well is the new niche farming. It's the new face of farming, where people have just small acreages but, in fact, are creating niche markets for, say, Cornish game hens, raising turkeys, or different products that they actually take and can sell locally so that people do that buying within a hundred miles, that new way of buying our food. Is this a growing industry in his riding, and is there any discussion about protecting our agricultural land?

**Mr. Quest:** Well, obviously it's very important that we protect our agricultural lands, our highly productive lands, all over the province. Certainly, this fits in with the province's land-use framework.

With respect to smaller operations, I'm not familiar with any reference to Cornish game hens and that type of thing, but certainly because of the value of the property, of course, in my constituency it is evolving into that situation: a lot of greenhouses, market gardens, that type of thing. So it is certainly becoming a lot more intense than it was based on the property values and the rich, productive land that we have in some areas of Strathcona.

**The Acting Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

**Mr. Benito:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to ask to ask the hon. Member for Strathcona how he feels the Speech from the Throne will be perceived in his constituency of Strathcona.

**Mr. Quest:** Well, Strathcona has always been a very enthusiastic, optimistic part of the world, so the constituents that I've talked to since the Speech from the Throne have all been generally very optimistic about it. I think the same optimism is prevalent throughout the province. We live in an incredible province. Albertans are positive and optimistic, energetic just by their nature. So I'm not sure that my constituency would be all that different from any other constituencies, but yeah, the response has been very, very positive.

**The Acting Speaker:** Standing Order 29(2)(a) is still available.

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

**Mr. Cao:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise today to respond to the Speech from the Throne given by His Honour the Lieutenant Governor. Before commenting on the throne speech, I would like to recognize the outstanding job that the hon. Lieutenant Governor has done and thank him for his service to this great province of ours. His is no small job, and he has gracefully proven his capabilities and brought his own style and finesse to this honoured position. Throughout these past five years, the Lieutenant Governor has shown a remarkable love for this province. He will be missed, and I wish him the best.

Mr. Speaker, I proudly address the Assembly today on behalf of my constituents in Calgary-Fort. During my time representing Calgary-Fort, I have had the opportunity to work and meet with so many of my constituents. I am proud to say that we have been working very well together, and together we have made life in Calgary-Fort better. My constituency is made up of hard-working citizens who are proud of being Albertans and being Canadians. Like many Albertans, they are most concerned with the current state of the economy. I know that they fear for their job stability, for the well-being of their families, and for the future as well. Calgary-Fort consists of communities that will benefit from the investments that the province is continuing to make in Albertans now and in the future. Making life better in our beautiful Alberta is our government's goal, and the Speech from the Throne provides a blueprint for us to achieve this goal.

**5:10**

There are several aspects of the Speech from the Throne that I would like to address as they are of particular interest to my constituents and to myself. I'm pleased to note that our government programs are very mindful of supporting those senior Albertans who have helped and contributed to our society. As an example, the proceeds earned from the sale of Alberta capital bonds will go directly towards supporting our senior citizens. I'm very pleased that this government is working to expand continuing care and supportive living capabilities. With this our seniors can trust that they will have the care they need when they need it.

Our far-sighted Alberta sustainability fund, set up years ago, like our household savings account, will protect the social programs for the most vulnerable in this province. I'm pleased that these programs will be protected and, in particular, the support for persons with disabilities and our vulnerable Albertans are not being forgotten.

Mr. Speaker, I'm also pleased that our government, in addition to protecting our vulnerable citizens, has made a commitment to



education. That is a very, very interesting point for my constituency as well. Education, I strongly believe, is an investment in our future. This government's drive to seek a new vision for Alberta's education system will benefit Alberta's children for years to come. With the availability of the resources that they need, there is no limit to what they can achieve and how they can contribute to our province's overall well-being.

Not only is our government focusing on our children but on postsecondary education as well. Our government has made a commitment to continue to build world-class universities. Mr. Speaker, this will help ensure that Alberta remains competitive with the rest of Canada and the world. Postsecondary students contribute to the prosperity of this province, and they help to contribute to ensure a bright future for all Albertans.

Another concern for my constituents is the safety of their living and the security of their communities. I'm also pleased to see that our government has dedicated itself to providing us with safer and more secure communities. As I see it, this priority is linked to enhancing Albertans' quality of life. Alberta citizens should not have to be fearful of walking about in their communities. As the Alberta government works to provide an enhanced sense of security, Albertans' quality of life will also be enhanced as they will also be free to sleep in the comfort of knowing that they and their families are safe. That feeling is invaluable.

I applaud the government for addressing gang crime, an issue that I know is on the minds of many of my constituents. With the new gang reduction strategy and the addition of front-line police officers we will all feel safer. This new strategy builds on the successful safe communities strategy, that is now two years old.

Mr. Speaker, as I stated earlier, my constituency of Calgary-Fort is made up of hard-working citizens, and they are striving to be successful and prosperous. I believe the plan our government has put forward, as stated in the throne speech, will give my constituents a renewed confidence in our province and in our future. In particular, the investment in infrastructure in all corners of the province is ensuring that we keep people working. On this particular point I'm very grateful that the Minister of Transportation is embarking on the southeast leg of the Calgary ring road, which runs through my riding.

By creating a competitive and innovative economy, jobs will not only be protected but created.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta has faced hardships in the past, and we have always persevered and come out stronger than before. I have confidence that we will once again rise above today's challenges and triumph in creating the kind of Alberta that we can all be proud of. Our Alberta government has a comprehensive plan that will lead us through these challenging times and will continue to make our province the best place to live, work, and dream. It is important that we continue to invest in our province. This investment will provide increased stability and renewed prosperity for all Albertans.

My last point regarding the Speech from the Throne is that I am very pleased and my constituents are very pleased to hear of the five-year stable funding for our public health care system.

I would like to thank the constituents of Calgary-Fort for allowing me to have the honour of representing them for these years in the House. I pledge that I will continue bringing constituents' concerns and ideas into government processes to make improvements in the quality of life for all Albertans. I look forward to the implementation of the government's plan, ensuring Alberta's continued success, and to this productive spring session.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to conclude by thanking the Lieutenant Governor for presenting the Speech from the Throne.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

**The Acting Speaker:** Standing order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

**Ms Pastoor:** Yes. I wonder if the hon. member might make a comment on the fact that the ring road is certainly needed in Lethbridge. I drive the Deerfoot all the time and realize that – sorry; Calgary.

**Mr. Denis:** That's a big difference.

**Ms Pastoor:** Yeah. Well, you know what? We're going to need a ring road soon, too.

Anyway, if he could comment on the ring road. In fact, the ring road is basically all driven toward car traffic. Where is the public transportation corridor that would go along with that ring road?

**Mr. Cao:** Well, I want to say that the ring road is mainly for commercial transportation. There is a need for it because that's part of the Canada-American-Mexico corridor. That ring road is part of it, particularly in the service sector of Calgary, where we have a very big industrial park.

When we talk about public transportation, I can only imagine that public transportation on the ring road will be buses like Greyhound and others. The city transit buses probably will be going inside the city, and that's done through funding through Municipal Affairs and other grants to municipalities. The city of Calgary has a big program, funded by our province, for light rail transit. As you know, they've put extra lengths on it. So I think that goes hand in hand with the ring road.

**The Acting Speaker:** Anyone else wish to participate in 29(2)(a)? Seeing none, the hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs.

**Mr. Denis:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today to respond to the Speech from the Throne from His Honour Norman Kwong. I have to say as well that I want to echo many of the comments from members on both sides of the House earlier today thanking His Honour and Her Honour for their great service to this province over the last several years. I have to say that my favourite memory of His Honour is his continual sense of humour no matter how long a day he must have had, and we've all had some long days here.

Mr. Speaker, this year marks my 10th anniversary as an Alberta resident, and I'm very proud to be Albertan, as is the Premier, as is the Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace. I have to say that when I look at the throne speech, I often look back at my 10 years here and how good it has been for me and what a great province this is in which we live.

5:20

Dealing with the throne speech itself, I was reflecting on this over the last couple of days. Moving forward to Bill 1, talking about competitiveness, competitiveness to me, Mr. Speaker, means more than just the competitiveness review that, obviously, is happening here and will be released shortly by the Minister of Energy. Competitiveness to me means competitiveness for small business, for individuals, a competitive economy, and, specifically, a competitive tax regime. One thing that the Premier has been clear on in the speech and throughout is that there will be no new taxes here. That means no new payroll taxes, no new income taxes. Of course, no new sales taxes; we're the only province that doesn't have one. That's important for our competitiveness as well.

I must reflect, Mr. Speaker, on my new ministry, meaning Housing and Urban Affairs. I have to say it was the highest honour of my life to be named to the cabinet here as minister for this area, and I wanted to look forward, to the issue of homelessness in our society. Anybody who takes a stroll in downtown Calgary or downtown Edmonton realizes that this is, in fact, an issue. It's an issue outside of Calgary and Edmonton as well, but it's most acute in these areas.

We're in the second year of this – and I'm happy that this was mentioned in the throne speech – the 10-year provincial homelessness plan that was developed by the Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness. It is a serious issue affecting Albertans, and it continues to grow and not just in boom times, when there are spikes in rental rates and in property values. This is a systemic problem that affects us year in/year out and day in/day out.

The 10-year plan to end homelessness incorporates a major shift in traditional ways of thinking about this issue. It's based on a Housing First approach, and it aims to provide permanent housing and necessary supports to the homeless in order to break the cycle of homelessness, which can be very difficult. This is a similar approach, Mr. Speaker, that's being used in jurisdictions in North America such as Portland and New York City. I would submit to you that Alberta's 10-year plan is better for the homeless and reduces the pressure on acute-care services, hospitals, police, and corrections, and even emergency doctors. Implementation of the Housing First model is estimated to reduce overall service costs by up to 50 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta's 10-year plan aligns directly with and supports local plans created by Alberta municipalities, and the secretariat and the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs will work directly with municipalities and local communities to implement these plans. If not addressed, the number of homeless Albertans could increase dramatically over the next several years. As part of this commitment to supporting safe and strong communities, this government has adopted the secretariat's plans and strategies. I ask you to be mindful that we're only in year 2 of 10 of this whole project. Ending homelessness as we know it today will make our communities safer, but it's a long-term issue that we have to address and that we have begun to address. Action is already under way to implement this new approach to homelessness by putting people and putting the need for housing first.

As a result of the Housing First model, Mr. Speaker, health and social supports will help homeless people become independent and productive citizens. I have to say that I think it's good that we have a plan to build 11,000 new units by 2012, but at the same time we can't just measure the success of this program solely on the amount of units that we build or the amount of people that we are able to assist but, rather, the amount of people that we're able to bring off of assistance, that can become self-sustaining themselves. That is a true measure of success.

Dealing with the issue as well, I'm very happy with what we've done to date, but there's much more to do, and that's what was mentioned in the throne speech in and of itself. Homelessness in itself is something that is not just addressed, of course, by government. There are many nongovernmental organizations such as the Calgary homeless association, which I've met with recently, that provide quality service to individuals, and it's important for us to partner with them as well.

I mentioned earlier today, Mr. Speaker, that some of the programs such as rent supplements that we provide are not entitlement-based programs but, rather, needs-based programs. When I looked at the means test that is applied under the act, it was rather interesting because when I came to Alberta 10 years ago, I would have qualified

for assistance under that program. However, not everybody has the fortune that I did of having a couple of university degrees. We have to help people move forward who maybe don't have the advantages that I had when I moved here.

I also wanted to address that the Speech from the Throne talked about crime. This is something that's very important in the constituency of Calgary-Egmont, that I'm privileged to represent. Of course, January 1, 2009, we had three murders on 94th Avenue. I won't deal with that directly because the matter is before the courts. At the same time, this said to me that the issue of crime and the issue of gang violence, specifically, is not one localized just to the downtowns of bigger cities like Calgary or Edmonton; rather, it has become a suburban issue. I had almost a record number of phone calls about that issue in the next few weeks that ensued. I'm very happy that the Minister of Justice and Attorney General is getting really serious, for lack of a better term, about this issue in our two major cities.

Of course the goal, Mr. Speaker, is that Alberta remains a safe place to live, work, and raise families, and that is my goal for my constituency and for all of Alberta as well. We obviously need a justice system that holds people accountable for their crimes and reflects the changing nature of society. It's a simple reality that we live in a much different world than we did 20, 30 years ago, when a gang fight was something you would hear of perhaps only on a television episode. It's here in Alberta today, and we have to deal with this. If we don't, it's simply at our own peril. Albertans expect the actions of their government to reflect their values, and that is something that we're working on here as well.

Mr. Speaker, I want to touch briefly on the issue of Alberta's pharmaceutical strategy as well. That was something that was also mentioned briefly in the throne speech. It was something that I had the pleasure of being involved with last year. The benefits of this, of course, are that pharmacists will be able to spend more time advising patients about their medications, Albertans will pay less for their prescription drugs, and both generic drug prices and brand name drug costs will be reduced, saving money for Albertans and, of course, the system. I think that this is a real step forward for health care, but as I often say to my staff, there's always room for improvement no matter how far you go.

Those are my submissions today with respect to the throne speech. I look forward to any questions or comments under 29(2)(a).

**The Acting Speaker:** Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for any questions or comments.

Seeing none, the hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

**Ms Evans:** Thank you very much. A singular honour to stand today and speak to the Speech from the Throne on behalf of the constituents I represent and to recognize, first, the valuable contribution His Honour Norman L. Kwong has provided not only as an outstanding sportsman and leader and philanthropist in his community but in these last five years as our Lieutenant Governor. Along with his wife, Mary, he has provided stellar stewardship in a most distinguished position in representing our province.

The Speech from the Throne and the promises contained therein and reinforced with yesterday's budget speech contemplate that in Alberta we still are in an advantaged position over many other people not only in Canada and in North America but in the world. Sometimes it's important to count those advantages and to contemplate what we're promising in this fiscal advantage that we discuss, in improving our health care, in building our safe and secure communities, and in being increasingly competitive in a global

economy. When we contemplate the Speech from the Throne, that we have written and presented to Albertans, it is light years ahead of so many other parts of the planet.

We are a conglomeration of people, a relatively new society, who have come from many places, where dreams of our ancestors may well have been fulfilled and exceeded by the things that we're contemplating and the actions we're taking. When I reflect on the innovation of the community and the innovators that are there, who serve not only in our government but who serve in many outstanding ways in corporate boardrooms and in corporate structures that build this province and its great advantages, I think of the beauty of representing people who are healthy, who are living the good life, and who are in many respects very mindful of their advantages and sharing those advantages with people far beyond our borders.

5:30

A recent example is that emergency services from the province help the people of Haiti, who have undergone yet another cruel blow not only to their health and their social structure but to their future economic prosperity. Here once again, not only within the government, we had people that came forward and provided leadership in Haiti. We had a number of people who said: we can adopt children. We can display ourselves in a way that shows the hearts that we have and extend to people who are less fortunate than us a helping hand in a time of need.

The leader of the emergency preparedness found his history in Strathcona county as a fire chief and in New Orleans in Katrina and then more recently organizing to a large extent on behalf of a request from the government of Canada emergency services personnel to go and help in Haiti. That kind of resilience, that kind of extending a helping hand is what the community I represent and the community the Member for Strathcona represents gives us, a great privilege. These folks have learned how to compare and compete but also to extend that helping hand. So members in this House have been privileged to know many who have assisted in that outpouring of compassion to other parts of the world.

We have many other ways that we are represented in the communities that gather with their representatives in this House, not the least of which are those innovators that are taking advantage of the oil and gas opportunities in our province and who are in this time of recession celebrating their environmental contributions as well as their contributions in enterprise and technology to improve the vast opportunities we have to compete in a global economy. Some of these folks have been cited in the most recent celebrations of *Alberta Oil: The Business of Energy*, that is a part of a periodical produced, again, in Alberta that talks about the trailblazers, the outposts of progress that create an environment where we build a greater tomorrow by acting today. When you read these kinds of things that are produced right here in our province – *Alberta Oil*, *Alberta Venture* magazines – you celebrate the capacity of what we're doing in Alberta through the entrepreneurs that are acting well beyond the scope of the government.

Productivityalberta.ca, which is referenced in this throne speech through the discussion of how we are going to work on our value-added, talks about the kinds of things that Alberta businesses can better do. In the throne speech are references to agriculture and agrifood industries as key and sustainable economic drivers of our province, the kinds of businesses that benefit by the leadership of Productivity Alberta. Through this leadership we are working on making sure that we have high-quality food products that continue to be in demand all over the world, in places like the United States and Australia but increasingly in places like Japan and in China. I think it behooves us to continue to provide our leadership and

support, providing the right tools for the job, doing the lean assessments that are done to make sure that our manufacturing is better and to work to refine and hone in on the products and the markets that we can improve upon in the years ahead.

My new responsibilities in this ministry will see us look very closely at our western economic partners, with both British Columbia and Saskatchewan, to see how we can work together in a way that reduces our expenditure for the infrastructure that we build and provide in other parts of the world but, in fact, still maintain the advocacy of the people that represent our province so that we work as partners in this partnership, collaborators in a partnership with other provinces and yet not, in fact, contemplate in any way being conspirators against the best advantages that each province can bring in marketing their own systems. To that extent, the TILMA agreement and more recently the partnership created by our Premier's innovation in extending a hand to Saskatchewan is a hallmark of the kinds of things that we can do to better the capacity to deliver in what has been described by the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development as almost the global jewel of some of the highest and best undeveloped resource-based economies in the world.

Clearly, we have as well a Charter that over the last 10 years and more contemplates how we deal with the capacity of the Northwest Territories to emerge as a global winner through their linkage, not only through health and social structures but their governmental linkage with the province of Alberta to improve upon the kinds of opportunities for value-added and access to international markets. We have developed here in western Canada a unit of competitiveness and increasingly a unit of advocacy that can benefit all.

One of the interesting things about the ministry I'm representing is that there are nine foreign offices, and the ministry, the Alberta House, if you will, in Washington, has an advocacy role which increasingly International and Intergovernmental Relations wants to move towards. It will help us market for the world the capacity we bring in the energy industry to do things in an environmentally sustainable way, so we will be marketing.

Not only are we doing that marketing in Washington, but the upcoming mission that is being contemplated by those that are involved in the CCS, carbon capture and storage, in Oslo, Norway, in Germany in Düsseldorf, and in the United Kingdom in London will contemplate how we work in a way of selling Alberta's innovation and capacity so that people understand that we intend to be clean, green, and sustainable in the future.

So advocacy, productivity, and increasing competitiveness will help us assure that "the best days in Alberta's energy story are yet to come," and those are the words straight from the Speech from the Throne.

I was interested in one of the more recent editions of *The Economist*, for January. There is actually a new edition out for February. On the editorial page under Leaders it talks about the size and the power of state. Then it talks about the growth of government, but it also speaks to something that I think is fundamental in this throne speech, to the way that the Alberta government has been developing not only its throne speech but the budget speech. It reads in the document on page 11: "How much a state spends often matters less than how it spends. Systems in which the state pays and the private sector provides often work well." It goes on to talk about how we work in a co-operative and collaborative way as a governance body with a private sector that delivers systems.

Many times we've talked in this House about how doctors and physicians providing primary health care do so as private people employed through the fees they charge that government pays and in many respects have provided very effective and efficient private partnerships that deliver public health care. We see this in many of

the P3 models that have in this House been accused of adding debt, but they have been debts that have been enabling us to provide a better infrastructure to lead to the development of highway 63. Future infrastructure needs in this province are taken care of when, in fact, we have Albertans who participate through the opportunities provided in policy to develop the kinds of things that we should: the businessman that's the farmer, the businessman that's the manufacturer, the businessman that's the small businessman, which is the core of the business leadership involved in Alberta albeit that it's sometimes overshadowed by the larger multinationals that develop our oil and gas industries.

5:40

In short, Mr. Speaker, this speech is about Albertans. It's about their entrepreneurial spirit. It's about continuing to take their place not only in Canada but in the world as global leaders. It's about living the values and lifestyle that our entrepreneurial grandparents and ancestors contemplated. Above all, perhaps it's about keeping our taxes low, our fees lower but maintaining support for health and education as the keys to the successful lifestyle that we hope will be our legacy to our children and our grandchildren in the future.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I take my leave. Thank you for the opportunity to present some comments on the Speech from the Throne.

**The Acting Speaker:** Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs.

**Mr. Denis:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The minister in her comments mentioned carbon capture and storage in an international context. There has been some negativity in this House with respect to carbon capture and storage. I wonder if she could comment on how this proposal is viewed internationally.

**Ms Evans:** Thank you very much for that opportunity. I think I'm going to take this opportunity to state my enormous pride in the Minister of Environment and the kinds of advocacy he has provided not only in Copenhagen but prior to that and in the post-Copenhagen strategy, where without fear of criticism he stands tall and makes it clear that Alberta has a role in developing a sustainable resource economy.

We have contemplated, he and I together and the newly appointed Minister of Energy, a way of increasing the advocacy on things that could be done in the future not only in the Euro-environment but across Canada to make sure that people in other parts of the country who may have slagged Alberta in Copenhagen are fully familiar with the advantages that they get from having an Alberta economy that's robust: huge tax advantages, huge advantages in the workplace environment. What we have to do is acknowledge that where we are spending some \$2 billion in carbon capture and storage with the hope of improving technological knowledge transfer not only within our province but elsewhere, we are only \$1 billion short of the entire budget of the United States on carbon capture and storage. We should celebrate that, sell that. That's a co-ordination role in my ministry with the players that our Premier has selected to more than adequately serve as advocates not only in the energy sector but for the due diligence in the work that's been done by our esteemed colleague the Minister of Environment.

**The Acting Speaker:** Standing Order 29(2)(a) is still available.

Seeing none, any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

**Mr. VanderBurg:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour and a privilege to stand up and speak today in reply to the Speech from the Throne. Like others so well said, it's an honour to have witnessed the Lieutenant Governor and his family here. It was pretty interesting. The family sat in front of me here during the throne speech, and it was very moving to watch them watch their father and husband during that time. I think that all of us had a lot of pride in the actions of our Lieutenant Governor.

Mr. Speaker, a lot was said during the speech. First, about the Alberta fiscal advantage, you know, we have over the last number of years had the opportunity to pay off in full \$23 billion in debt and managed to save about \$25 billion in cash, at the same time having one of the lowest income tax rates as well. And one thing that Albertans all enjoy is not paying a provincial sales tax. Let's remember that one of the promises our Premier made in the campaign for the leadership and afterwards in the election was not to consider a provincial sales tax. So many times we hear from people that say, "Well, over in Ontario or in B.C." I say, "Well, you know, do you want what they have?" They say, "Well, what do you mean?" I say, "Well, would you like to have that sales tax added onto everything we purchase?" Of course, the answer is no, and Albertans pride themselves in standing out in Canada in having that advantage.

As well, the Alberta capital bonds were talked about, and I spoke about this in the Legislature last fall. Many of my constituents had taken the time over the past number of months to talk about the opportunity with capital bonds. I think that we're going to see a great opportunity for Albertans to purchase those. They'll purchase them with pride like my parents had in Canada savings bonds. It wasn't just the bond. It was a piece of paper investing in Canada, and now people will have that opportunity to say: yes, I have that piece of paper, and I've invested in Alberta infrastructure and especially in the opportunity to invest in our seniors' housing projects. I think, you know, that it's something to be very, very proud of, and I'll be very proud to promote the sale of those bonds.

Government must live within its means, and we heard many speeches here much earlier about the deficit that we'll have from last year and this year and next year. Let's remember, no different than I would teach our sons as they have a household and new families that they've started, that sometimes you have to spend a little more, that sometimes you have to save a little more. You have to make those decisions as a family and as a government on when those times are.

I think this is a perfect time, Mr. Speaker, to spend a little more and invest in the future. But not too much. We don't want to leave debt for our grandchildren. I'm a new grandfather and very proud of that. I don't want to leave a debt for my little Alyssa, but I want to make sure that she has some good infrastructure to take part in in five years when she goes to elementary school, that there's a new modern school for her to attend, that there are good roads for her to go to school on and good infrastructure. I think that was talked about by our Lieutenant Governor in the speech, that he envisioned an opportunity for us now to invest in the future, to not leave debt in the future but to invest in the future. I think that all of us are so very, very proud to take part in that.

The second issue that the Lieutenant Governor talked about was improving our health care system. I can say that in my constituency one of the opportunities I had early on in 2001, when I first got elected – and I spoke about that in my first speech in the Assembly – was that we needed to address the issue of housing for our seniors. When I was elected, we had somewhat of a good system in Whitecourt-Ste. Anne. We had two housing authorities but two housing authorities that were very taxed. There were long waiting

lists and not a lot of opportunities for our seniors when they needed a lodge or they needed some assistance for further health care to take part in.

Well, since 2001 we've made a large expansion in Whitecourt to the Spruce View Lodge, and we've modernized the facility. We have a facility that I was proud of when my mom moved into it. She said that it was time for her to move out of her home and into a lodge, and I was proud of that facility and would recommend that to anybody in our community.

5:50

As well, since 2001 we built a new lodge in Onoway. The community did some fundraising, and I think you'll all remember when we had the Ralph bucks. You know, every Albertan received \$400, and we had a campaign of: donate your Ralph bucks to the Onoway seniors' facility. Any of the opposition people or anybody in Alberta – and I put the challenge out here – that didn't want those monies could sure donate them to the Onoway chateau and build a home for the seniors. That's what I did with my money, and that's what a lot of people in our constituency did. Then in turn we found some matching grants and built a great facility in Onoway, and a lot of seniors in that area call the Onoway chateau home now. [interjections] If you want the floor, you can have it, but I have the floor right now, and you better respect that.

Mr. Speaker, as well, we've had the opportunity in Evansburg in my constituency through the Legion to create a Legion lodge, and what a great home that we've helped create through some provincial granting and through mainly the community getting together and working on behalf of their residents. I can say, again, that the people in Evansburg sure appreciate that new facility.

Mr. Speaker, we had the opportunity in the fall of this year to have the sod-turning of a new Mayerthorpe lodge. The lodge that was built in the early '60s was great, but it doesn't meet the standards of 2009-2010. We've had the opportunity to access some housing grants. Again, we're carrying on with the tradition in our constituency of not talking about these facilities but actually building them. We've done the sod-turning, and construction is on now. I can say that I'm very, very proud of what we've done in our constituency as far as seniors' housing.

You know, the Lieutenant Governor talked about building safe and caring communities, and we've had some issues with some gangs. I have to thank our past Solicitor General. There were concerns that came forward in the town of Whitecourt. The Solicitor General addressed those issues. Did we solve the gang issues completely? No, but we sure raised some hell and said that the community would not tolerate gangs settling in Whitecourt-Ste. Anne. I'd like to thank him for that help.

We talked in the throne speech about the increased competitive issues in the global economy. Forest issues in Whitecourt-Ste. Anne are huge, and it's tough when you're supplying mainly one market, the United States. Our big mills employ thousands of people in Whitecourt-Ste. Anne and have supplied millions and millions of

board feet of dimension lumber to the housing markets in the United States. So we felt the issue of the downturn in the economy in the United States, and it's affected our industry, but we've managed to keep competitive by keeping those mills modern and by keeping that workforce very well trained and diverse. I'm feeling pretty good about the forest industry, about how they'll come out of this. I'm hearing that the prices in the lumber market are slowly coming up, so as long as we don't see the Canadian dollar fluctuate too much, we'll see some outlook of being very, very positive in the forest sector.

Mr. Speaker, I see also in the throne speech that about 50 per cent of our provincial gross domestic product is tied to energy in some way. Well, we see that in Whitecourt-Ste. Anne and especially in the service sector. The service sector plays a very important role in employment in Whitecourt-Ste. Anne. We have many, many companies and their head offices located in our communities, and they employ and they spend big, big dollars in the area. So it's noticed that the oil patch has slowed down over the last little while. Again, I'm talking with folks in that sector that have had to let people go last spring but are hiring them back, so it's great to hear that the companies are starting to come back and do some work again in the area.

Earlier there was some talk by members in the government caucus about the clean energy future, and it talks in the throne speech about Alberta's oil sands. You know, there's a great amount of attention addressed to the oil sands and a lot of unfair attention, I can say, about the oil sands. But what a lot of people don't understand when you talk about oil sands is that it's not always surface mining projects. It's a lot of in situ work, you know, work that's done underground, and the footprint on the land is very minimal. I had the opportunity with a number of caucus members to go and tour the Devon facilities in the Fort McMurray area, and I'd encourage the new Minister of Energy to take part in a tour and see how well they've worked with the local community and to see how innovative that group has been. I think they're producing oil at a pretty competitive price, and I think we'll only see that opportunity grow.

You know, Mr. Speaker, I could talk here for hours about the opportunities in Whitecourt-Ste. Anne and how the Speech from the Throne related to that, but I see that the clock is ticking, and at this time I'd like to adjourn debate.

Thank you, sir.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

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

**Mr. Renner:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that the Assembly now do stand adjourned until 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:58 p.m. to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]











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