



Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature  
Third Session

# Alberta Hansard

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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.

Thursday, February 11, 2010

[The Speaker in the chair]

### Prayers

**The Speaker:** Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Let us keep ever mindful of the special and unique opportunity we have to work for our constituents and our province, and in that work let us find strength and wisdom. Amen.

Please be seated.

### Introduction of Guests

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

**Mr. Horner:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure for me to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislature a group of 48 very intelligent and exuberant young people from St. Albert, the Bertha Kennedy Catholic community school. I had a chance to speak with the kids in the rotunda. If this is an example of what the province's future is going to be, we are indeed in good hands. They are accompanied by teachers Mr. Scott Raypold and Mrs. Brianne Tworek. They have parent helpers Mrs. Feraco, Mr. Neuls, Mrs. Saive, and Mrs. Benko. I believe they are in the members' gallery. I would ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Legislative Assembly.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

**Ms Calahasen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly 36 visitors from Prairie River junior high school in High Prairie. They are here on a tour of the province, starting out with the most wonderful place of all, this Legislature. They are accompanied by teachers – and I'd ask that they rise as I say their names – Ms Rachel Mount and Mrs. Michelle Keshen and parent helpers Mr. Ed Fudali, Mr. Ed Leonard, and Mr. Dave Paddon. I'd ask that all the students and the teachers as well rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

**Ms Notley:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly our two sessional researchers for the NDP opposition caucus. Gwyneth Dunsford and Meagan Johnston are seated in the public gallery. Meagan hails from St. Albert and recently graduated from McGill University's Faculty of Law. She's a lifelong feminist and activist in the antipoverty, environmental, and queer liberation movements. Gwyneth, who is originally from Rocky Mountain House, studied in Norway and in Washington, DC, while pursuing her BA from the U of A. Her primary interests are women's issues, aboriginal rights, and arts and culture. Both of our sessional researchers have already shown themselves to be very talented individuals and a pleasure to work with. Mr. Speaker, I ask that both Gwyneth and Meagan now please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

**Mr. Elniski:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly four remarkable individuals from the Networks Activity Centre located in my constituency of Edmonton-Calder. The Networks Activity Centre is a leisure and recreation program for the survivors of brain injury. The hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports and I had the privilege of touring the facility in January and were both very impressed at the amazing work that is being done in this community. I would ask these individuals to rise as I introduce them to receive the traditional greetings of the Assembly: Mrs. Christine Hrasko, the president; my good friend Mr. George Kapetanakis, the executive director; Mr. Richard Hanes, a participant in the program; and Ms Andrea Vermeulen, also a participant in the program. Please give them the traditional greeting. Thank you.

### Members' Statements

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

#### Networks Activity Centre

**Mr. Elniski:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to speak a little bit more about the incredible group of people that I introduced a moment ago called the Networks Activity Centre, or NAC. NAC has been supporting brain injury survivors and their families since 1998. By creating a community-based system for social contact among adults with brain injury, Networks creates opportunities for these individuals to participate in social networks outside of the home.

This is a place where they can partake in recreational and educational activities that contribute immensely to their personal growth. These activities include playing games, computers, sewing, quilting, painting, ceramics, exercise, swimming, theatre, leather work, and some actually quite good karaoke. Anything that will allow them to develop new skills and brush up on old ones contributes to the confidence that we build in these individuals.

Mr. Speaker, it is essential to the rehabilitation of the brain injured that they reintegrate themselves into the community and develop new interests and new relationships. I would very much like to thank these individuals involved for increasing the quality of life for brain injury survivors and especially for those who have joined us here today. Networks is a tremendous addition to my constituency and to all of Alberta. They're able to recognize the need for support and to provide it to those who need it within this community.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

#### Calgary International Airport Development

**Mr. Kang:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very proud to represent the thriving, fast-growing communities of northeast Calgary, but the rapid growth of these communities also presents challenges, particularly when it comes to transportation. If nothing is done, expansion of the Calgary International Airport will soon strand thousands of commuters in Calgary-McCall and vastly increase congestion on Deerfoot Trail, with huge impacts on the economy, environment, traffic safety, and the quality of life of Calgarians. Many businesses will be harmed, many lives made more difficult. Building the proposed airport tunnel is the only way to avoid this potential headache, and building it now is the only way to avoid an even greater expense in the future.

Yesterday afternoon I met with the Minister of Transportation to plead the case of the tens of thousands of Calgarians who will be

tremendously affected if the tunnel is not built. The city of Calgary and the Airport Authority have already committed \$90 million to help build the tunnel. Now the federal and provincial governments must come to the table before March 1 to make this project happen.

The new runway at Calgary International will open up Alberta to a far greater range of international flights. This is a positive development for every citizen in this province. For business, for travel, for cultural interchange and family ties this is a great development, not just for Calgary but for all of Alberta. That is why I believe that it is a provincial imperative to support the construction of the airport tunnel, and the people of Calgary cannot be asked to bear the burden alone.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

### 2010 Olympic Winter Games

**Mr. Rodney:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Tomorrow night the Olympic torch will be lit at the opening ceremonies of the 2010 Vancouver-Whistler Winter Games. International attention will be focused on our neighbours next door, but this is also a unique opportunity to show the rest of the planet that Alberta is a world-class destination for tourism, business, culture, winter sports, and so much more.

Alberta enjoys a great history in this respect, and Albertans have every right to be proud of the legacy of the 1988 Calgary Olympic Winter Games. Since 2004 our Alberta government has invested more than \$100 million to renew our Olympic heritage venues, and this has been invaluable in solidifying Alberta's position as Canada's national centre of winter sports excellence. This leadership role is irrefutable: more than half of the 2010 Canadian Olympic team were born in Alberta or live and train in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, our province will shine in other ways during the games. With the Alberta train, Alberta House, and Alberta Plaza we will share our story with the rest of the world. Alberta artists will offer medal-worthy performances in the Cultural Olympiad and in free nightly concerts at Alberta Plaza. In addition, an Alberta executive chef will showcase our food industry with gourmet cuisine from our own backyard.

Meanwhile, Albertans can be part of the Olympic experience in the comfort of their own homes from nightly live streaming videos of artists performing at the Plaza to the latest Twitter update about Albertans owning the podium. Our constituents can enjoy up-to-date news and results online at [alberta.ca/vancouver2010](http://alberta.ca/vancouver2010). By the end of February the story of Alberta's athletes, artists, food, and opportunities will be well known.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that the 2010 Olympic Winter Games is an invaluable venue for us to tell the rest of the country and the rest of the world about our amazing Alberta spirit and celebrate our successes together. Go, Canada, go, and go, Alberta, go.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

1:40

### Black History Month

**Mr. Rogers:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. February is Black History Month. It's a time to reflect on and celebrate the achievements and contributions of black Canadians and black people throughout the world. I feel particularly honoured to be presenting this statement today, February 11, the day 20 years ago that Nelson Mandela walked out of prison and into the history books. His belief in the equality of all people led him to change the world forever.

And so it has been in our province, Mr. Speaker. For the past 100 years black people have been coming to Alberta seeking freedom and equality, whether from the Jim Crow laws and discrimination of the turn-of-the-century United States or the instability and violence of other countries or, as my parents and many of their friends did in the 1960s, seeking a better future for their children.

On this day I think of Corporal Ainsworth Dyer, a black soldier based out of Edmonton who lost his life in Afghanistan in 2002. I think of Violet King, who in 1954 was the first black woman to graduate from the U of A law school and Alberta's first black female lawyer. Of course, we can't talk about Alberta history without acknowledging one of our greatest cowboys, John Ware.

Mr. Speaker, many great black Canadians have blazed a trail both in our province and throughout this great country, and there are many great examples of today's contributors, people like Dr. Tony Fields, the cancer specialist; William Eddins, conductor of the ESO; Dr. Fil Fraser, the noted writer, broadcaster, and filmmaker; and the poet laureate of Edmonton, Rollie Pemberton, known by his stage name of Cadence Weapon, who is the grandson of the late Eskimo great, Rollie Miles.

Mr. Speaker, I'm honoured to serve in this Legislature as the first black member along with my colleague the hon. Minister of Culture and Community Spirit, the second such serving member. I'm very proud to live in this province at a time when colour is neither a barrier nor a requirement to serve in this prestigious office.

I would like to commend all the organizers and volunteers of the many events throughout Black History Month and encourage my colleagues and all Albertans to participate in the celebrations. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

### Lunar New Year

**Mr. Cao:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. February 14, 2010, is New Year's Day for over 1.5 billion people in the world. It is celebrated as a 4,000-year tradition of people in China, Vietnam, Korea, Japan, and many other parts around the globe. On behalf of all members of the Assembly, I wish them all [remarks in Mandarin Chinese, Vietnamese, Korean, and Japanese]. It all means: Happy New Year.

Based on the lunar cycle, there are 60 names for the years based on 12 animal zodiacs and five elements. From the first use of the lunar calendar this coming year, 4078, is the Year of the Metal Tiger. Being a feline species like a cat, it doesn't matter how it is tossed around; the tiger always lands on its four feet solidly. Attached to the metal element, it is strong like steel and valuable like gold. This year it is special to have New Year's fall on Valentine's Day and during the Olympics. We celebrate love, relationships, achieving our potential. This will be a great year for Alberta and Canada.

New Year's Day is celebrated as a family affair, a time of renewing and thanksgiving. Remembrance of ancestors is the most vital part of the New Year's ritual, linking the living members with those who have passed away. Nothing should be lent or borrowed on this day as anyone who does so will lend and borrow all year round. The New Year's Day activities set a precedent.

Mr. Speaker, there are some Lunar New Year traditions that may apply to us in the Assembly. Everyone should refrain from using bad language and unlucky words. References to the past year are also avoided as everything should be turned toward the new year and a new beginning. It is believed that the appearance and attitude during the New Year's celebration sets the tone for the rest of the year.

To conclude, Mr. Speaker, I wish all my colleagues here a healthy, happy, productive year of the roaring golden tiger.

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

### Provincial Budget

**Ms Notley:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In making its lofty promises about funding for health care and education, this government has abandoned the people who need our help most. There is no place in this budget for Albertans struggling to keep a roof over their families' heads, for Albertans who are working minimum wage jobs, for Albertans who are homeless or who are at-risk youth in the foster care system. So much for the compassionate Conservatives.

Mr. Speaker, this government cut \$112 million from the Ministry for Housing and Urban Affairs. This government cut the affordable housing program in half.

This government cut \$2 million from its already overburdened rent supplement program despite the fact that this program was full for 2009 by August and was thus unable to help thousands of people who needed it. Mr. Speaker, this government has also cut \$28 million from services to its most at-risk youth. The government broke its promise to index the minimum wage, taking \$240 out of the pockets of 20,000 low-income Albertans.

This government would like us to believe that these cuts are necessary to boost the health care system, but really they will just increase costs. By cutting funding for social services, this government may look like it is saving money, but it's only shifting the cost. If you don't make the commitment to put roofs over people's heads, if you don't make the commitment to care for kids who need child intervention, you'll be finding a lot more people in the health care system because of the consequences of life on the streets. One way for our economy to recover is to increase access to postsecondary education. Again, instead we see cuts to student grants that will limit opportunities to students living in low-income families.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans see that this budget isn't neglecting people who fall through the cracks; rather, it's almost pushing them down through those cracks. We need to do better, and with the inherent wealth that we have in this province there is absolutely no reason that we cannot. [Disturbance in the gallery]

**The Sergeant-at-Arms:** Order in the gallery!

### 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 a report that was released in the fall by Water Matters. It's called Share the Water: Building a Secure Water Future for Alberta. It's produced by Water Matters and Ecojustice. I will table the appropriate number of copies of that.

The second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is from constituent Jack Barrows, who is writing with concerns around the tailings ponds, which he likens to the Chernobyl disaster, and who is very concerned about the chemicals that may be leaching into the groundwater supply. I will table the appropriate number of copies of that document.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table for the benefit of the House and Albertans a

document entitled Seniors Care in Crisis: Alberta Seniors Deserve Better; It's Time to Take Action. It's produced by Public Interest Alberta.

Thank you.

### Projected Government Business

**The Speaker:** The Official Opposition House Leader.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. According to the standing orders I may ask a question of the Government House Leader in which he would share with the Assembly the projected government House business for the week commencing the 16th of February.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes. Of course, Monday, February 15, being Family Day, we will not be sitting.

On Tuesday, February 16, 2010, in the afternoon under Government Bills and Orders the potential for further consideration of His Honour's Speech from the Throne and potentially second reading of Bill 1, the Alberta Competitiveness Act; Bill 2, the Professional Statutes Amendment Act, 2010; and Bill 3, the Fatal Accidents Amendment Act, 2010.

We will also anticipate receiving letters from His Honour the Lieutenant Governor with respect to supplementary supply, which would be tabled, which would then afford us the opportunity on Wednesday, February 17, under Government Bills and Orders for Committee of Supply for supplementary estimates and, time permitting, consideration of His Honour's Speech from the Throne.

On Thursday, February 18, in the afternoon under Government Bills and Orders day 6 of consideration of His Honour's speech as well as the potential for further second reading time on Bill 1, the Alberta Competitiveness Act; Bill 3, the Fatal Accidents Amendment Act, 2010; and discussion of Bill 2 at whatever stage, second reading or Committee of the Whole.

### Oral Question Period

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

### Health Care Funding

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Health Quality Council of Alberta recently released a report which highlighted that under the management of this government and Alberta Health Services emergency room wait times in Alberta have actually increased between 2007 and 2009. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: when will the minister provide details showing how the \$1.7 billion increase to Alberta Health Services will improve emergency access for Albertans?

1:50

**Mr. Zwodzesky:** Mr. Speaker, very soon. In fact, I anticipate making an announcement next week with respect to a specific strategy that has been developed with, by, and for the Alberta Health Services folks to benefit all Albertans, and that will include looking at how we can reduce the wait times and how we can improve access time to family doctors and to specialists.

**The Speaker:** The hon. leader.

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you. How many additional acute care beds will this new funding mean for Calgary hospitals, now stretched beyond their limits?

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Mr. Speaker, I just rushed in from Calgary. In fact, I was at the Peter Lougheed hospital just hours ago, and I met with people in the emergency department. I'm sure the member asking the question would be happy to know that I informed them that our capital plan is being worked on right now government-wide. It's about a \$7 billion plan this year. The Health and Wellness component of that for health facilities is going to be \$2.5 billion, and we'll have the details very soon.

**The Speaker:** The hon. leader.

**Dr. Swann:** Well, thank you. Then probably the minister will be able to answer the question about the 140 beds that lie empty in the Peter Lougheed hospital and why we're going to wait three years for a new hospital when we have 140 empty beds in the Peter Lougheed that could be opened. When will they be opened?

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Mr. Speaker, one of the wonderful things I learned today is that the new wing of the Peter Lougheed hospital is providing outstanding care, and those are 120 or thereabouts brand new beds. Unfortunately, in order to get those open, they had to close those that were in the existing facility. What I've said to them is that all we've done is sort of shift the number of beds from one centre to another. Those that are there and vacant in the existing Peter Lougheed wing I've asked Alberta Health Services if they would look at, now that they have their five-year funding plan in place and now that we're moving forward, to see what can be done to utilize those beds as well.

**Dr. Swann:** Good news. Good news, Mr. Speaker. We'll hold you to that.

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

#### Hip and Knee Surgeries

**Dr. Swann:** Since May of last year Edmontonians have been waiting in pain because this government cannot manage the health system. Last May the Royal Alexandra hospital was told that they're working too efficiently, performing too many hips and knees, so their funding for elective surgery was cut by 15 per cent. To the same minister: given the budget increase will the Royal Alex now be directed to work to their full capacity and finally start reducing the number of Albertans waiting in pain for hip and knee surgery?

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

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was at the Royal Alex just last week, and I was there the week before. I was touring and learned a lot about how that hospital functions as part of my learning curve. Now that we have a fixed budget and now that we know a little bit more about the predictable and stable funding, I'm sure we'll be able to address exactly those kinds of issues. I'm grateful for the honourable doctors and the hon. Leader of the Opposition's question in that regard because it will help us focus on what's important, our patients, and that's what we're doing.

**The Speaker:** The hon. leader.

**Dr. Swann:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. A plan is what is needed, and this minister has yet to show that he has a plan other than to pile on more money. Are there enough staff to actually increase the number of hip and knee operations at the Alex? Staffing.

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Mr. Speaker, staffing is an issue, and that's why on Dr. Duckett's blog today you will see a comment on how we're going to retain the maximum number of people possible, how we might possibly be hiring even more people to keep up with the demands for the services that Albertans expect out of the Alberta health care system. We are focused on a plan, exactly that, that will deliver the best performing publicly funded health system in Canada right here in Alberta, and we're going to get that done.

**Dr. Swann:** Well, what an interesting flip-flop in messaging from Dr. Duckett between this month and last.

If the minister has a plan, he should have specific details and outcomes. Can the minister tell Albertans how many more hip and knee surgeries the budget increase in Alberta Health Services will get for Albertans?

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Mr. Speaker, that will depend partly on how quickly we can get on with activity-based funding, which addresses exactly that. We'll know more by April 1, quite clearly. We'll be having a meeting next week, which will bring together the nurses, the doctors, Alberta Health Services, myself, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. We're going to sit down and thrash through some of this stuff, including performance measures, which I suspect is partly where the hon. leader is going. We'll get there.

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

#### Oil and Gas Royalties

**Mr. Taylor:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, you can see why the energy industry has lost so much confidence in this government. I mean, two of the most senior ministers apparently can't agree on whether royalty changes are going to happen or not. Yesterday the Minister of Energy apparently told reporters that royalty changes were not going to take place a mere two hours after the finance minister told the same reporters the exact opposite. To the Minister of Energy. Here's your chance to clear things up. Will this government be fixing the royalty system in this province or not?

**Mr. Liepert:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to clear things up because certain media have taken out of context what I believe was said yesterday. I can't comment on what the finance minister said in a private meeting, but let me be very clear about what is happening. We are in the process of going through a competitiveness review. Part of that competitiveness review is to ensure that our royalty structures within the royalty framework are appropriate. There is no new royalty framework because that is much greater than just royalties, and that's what will be coming as part of the competitiveness review.

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

**Mr. Taylor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. I'm still wondering – I mean, I know media does sometimes take remarks out of context; it's happened to me – how workers in the oil and gas industry, how investors in the oil and gas industry let alone

other sectors of our economy are meant to trust a government that's working, or being reported to work, at cross-purposes with itself?

**Mr. Liepert:** Well, I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, one thing that is certain: there's a lot more trust in this government than in the Liberal opposition. In the last election the former leader was campaigning for higher royalties, and just a couple of weeks ago we had this particular leader, this particular opposition, come out with a report, which is the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers' report, verbatim now as their new Liberal policy. So I have some difficulty understanding where they're coming from.

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

**Mr. Taylor:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. CAPP called. They're wondering why you haven't.

To the Minister of Energy: why aren't you more aggressively pursuing a pipeline to the west coast? It's not only royalties where this government needs to take urgent action. Our reliance on one single market south of the border places our energy exports at risk of boycott, so why aren't you more aggressively pursuing a pipeline to the west coast?

**Mr. Liepert:** Well, I'll be very happy to send a copy of our energy strategy over to the member because clearly outlined in our energy strategy are the initiatives that we are taking. We recognize that we do not want to be so reliant on one particular customer. There's a lot of work going on there, Mr. Speaker.

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

#### Funding for Children in Care

**Ms Notley:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On the very day the Premier is travelling to Vancouver to take part in Alberta's \$8.3 million advertisement at the Olympics, back home our government has a practice of keeping children in its care in downtown offices with 24-hour supervision because no other safe place is there for them to go. To the minister of children's services: how can the minister possibly justify reducing support for child protection when it is abundantly clear that her ministry is already operating over capacity and children are suffering as a result?

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

**Mrs. Fritz:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you know, our recent budget announcement is \$1.1 billion for this ministry. I want to assure you that children and youth remain our number one priority. They always have been; they always will be. I want you to know that. Also, I want you to be certain of the safety and well-being of our children and youth, that they're not put at risk. I can tell you that in the budget what this member is referring to is under child intervention. Many people think that we go and we take that child into care under child intervention. That's simply not the case.

**Ms Notley:** Mr. Speaker, once you take into account inflationary and population pressures, the real cut in this area is at least 10 per cent. Now, last year in the first six months 150 children in care suffered abuse. That's simply not the kind of record that justifies any kind of reduction in support. Why doesn't the minister call a spade a spade and admit that children in Alberta will suffer as a result of these cuts to her budget?

**Mrs. Fritz:** Well, Mr. Speaker, this budget, as I said, is \$1.1 billion. It's a 3.1 per cent increase. Child intervention is multidimensional. That means early intervention, and we have excellent organizations out in the community that are doing early intervention. I was over at the parent link centre for west Edmonton this morning, at the Jasper Place Child and Family Resource Centre, and you would be amazed at the good work that they're doing for early intervention so that they help families with their children to remain successful and not go into care.

2:00

**Ms Notley:** Well, Mr. Speaker, that's interesting because, in fact, in terms of early intervention the prevention of family violence and bullying budget was also cut by roughly 10 per cent. These are the kinds of services that the minister knows help keep families together, and if they're cut, it's likely that more kids will end up in government care as a result. Why won't the minister admit that, in short, the system is losing safe places for children and that these cuts will make it worse?

**Mrs. Fritz:** Mr. Speaker, I want to assure you once again that early intervention through our community programs is enhanced. It was legislated here with the family enhancement act. We have been working, changing our programs to be really responsible. The very earliest we can do is out in the community, and it is working. This budget is a good, solid budget for Children and Youth Services.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

#### Oil Sands Development

**Mr. Boutilier:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Communication is the key, the government says. Everyone will communicate better. It's a new team. Albertans will have to take a haircut, and the buffet is closed. Well, the photo which I will table at the appropriate time says: not even a trim. My question to the minister of finance is this: does he not like haircuts, or is he planning on becoming a long-haired hippie, moving away from his core political values?

**Dr. Morton:** Mr. Speaker, I've carefully burned all the pictures of me prior to 1975, so I know that the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo has not seen those pictures. In fact, my haircut has been getting shorter and shorter, and I'm more than happy.

**Mr. Boutilier:** Well, he didn't answer the question, but I'll ask it again. Communication is the key, the government says. The budget reflects increased revenue projection in oil sands bitumen royalties, which I believe is very important. It creates jobs for my community, Albertans, and all of Canada. However, I will table the *Globe and Mail*. The Minister of Energy says: I want to slow down the oil sands. Your numbers say that you want to speed up the oil sands. This is a total contradiction. Which is it? Do you want to speed up the oil sands, Mr. Minister of Finance?

**Dr. Morton:** Mr. Speaker, we'll have to find the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo a job in the media; he's doing such a great job of taking things out of context. In fact, I seem to have recollections of the hon. member voicing concerns many times about things going too fast up in Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo. Are oil sands revenues increasing from last budget to this? Absolutely. Will they continue to increase? Absolutely. I've said that Alberta's future is in the north, and we all support that.

**Mr. Boutilier:** Mr. Speaker, to the minister of finance. All Albertans are watching. The question is that you are saying full speed ahead with the oil sands in order to back up your budget numbers, quite contrary to what the Minister of Energy has said in the *Globe and Mail*. Is this full speed ahead with the oil sands in terms of development, in creating jobs for Albertans? Yes or no.

**Dr. Morton:** Mr. Speaker, did anybody hear the words “full speed ahead” on Tuesday afternoon? I didn’t. In fact, I’ll send a copy of the speech over, and of course they’re not there.

We will continue with the orderly development there. We’ve created a positive environment for investment. Based on that, we’ve seen five announcements of new projects in the oil sands, so obviously there will be new jobs and new wealth created in the north.

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

#### Calgary International Airport Development

**Mr. Kang:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government talks about competitiveness but will not back the Calgary airport tunnel, a project that will keep businesses going, keep people employed, and increase tourism. This government talks about being green, but they won’t support a project that will keep cars, trucks, and airplanes from idling. To the Minister of Transportation: has the minister studied the economic and social impact of not building the tunnel?

**Mr. Ouellette:** Mr. Speaker, I know that the hon. member is trying to do the right thing, but I do not understand why he doesn’t understand that he’s trying to drag me into something that has nothing to do with my job. My job is to look after provincial highways in Alberta, and the airport tunnel is a municipal project. If you look back at the amount of money that we transferred to Calgary last year, there was double enough money there to build the tunnel if they would have made it their first priority.

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

**Mr. Kang:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don’t think the airport tunnel is a Calgary issue; it is an Alberta issue. The minister should be taking a look at the bigger picture.

To the minister again. The airport is already over capacity. Without an airport tunnel we can expect even more traffic problems. Why doesn’t the minister think that Calgary needs this airport tunnel?

**Mr. Ouellette:** Mr. Speaker, I absolutely have not at any time said that Calgary didn’t need it or did need it. I just said that it wasn’t our responsibility. I’ll tell you that this member will be one of the first people that will be out there if we change and if I sway from policy and do something that I’m not supposed to be looking after and look after it. They’ll be the first ones jumping down my throat on not following our policies.

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

**Mr. Kang:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the contrary, I think I’ll be the first one applauding the minister to do the right thing, to come through with the funding for the airport tunnel.

To the minister again. The tunnel is a necessity for the LRT to go to the airport. Will the minister reconsider and put his support behind the airport tunnel?

**Mr. Ouellette:** Mr. Speaker, as you know, there’s new money going to Calgary in the new budget that just came out. They have to decide what their priorities are and what infrastructure they spend their money on. I’ll tell you, we have members on our side of the House, the Member for Calgary-Montrose and the Member for Calgary-Cross, that have been working very hard with my department also, trying to figure out how they could get support for the people in Calgary. We’re building a ring road around the city of Calgary to help get rid of the congestion that he’s talking about on the Deerfoot. Therefore, I want to stick to the job I’m doing and try to do the very best for Albertans that I can.

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

#### WCB Appeals Commission

**Mr. Elniski:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Public Agencies Governance Act is intended to bring greater transparency to quasi-judicial agency governance and generally has been well received. However, in a recent conversation with an employers’ safety organization they indicated to me that some challenges existed with respect to the provisions of the timelines for service on public bodies. My question is for the Minister of Employment and Immigration. This legislation may have a negative impact on the pool of WCB appeals commissioners. How will you mitigate the loss of qualified appeals commissioners and ensure that we don’t run out of the good folks?

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

**Mr. Lukaszuk:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. When appointing commissioners to the Appeals Commission, first of all, it should be stressed that the Appeals Commission has to be balanced. The balance is composed of representatives of the labour world and the employers’ world. So when appointing commissioners to the Appeals Commission, that is the first prism through which I look to appoint new commissioners. But there’s another balance, of continuity, of experience so that we get quality decisions, accurate decisions. Also, there has to be a succession plan built into it so new commissioners who get appointed can learn from the experience of the more savvy ones.

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

**Mr. Elniski:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question is to the same minister. Will you endeavour to use section 14(4) of the Public Agencies Governance Act to provide a grace period for commissioner appointments?

**Mr. Lukaszuk:** Mr. Speaker, that is a section that can always be used, but there is no necessity to even contemplate it because the Appeals Commission has a chair, and the chair appoints and recommends members to the commission. The chair is in charge of making sure that this balance that I referenced prior exists – hence, it is labour and employers, experience versus nonexperience – so that we don’t continuously renew the same commissioners. If we did, there would be a time when most of them would retire, and there would be no new ones with the experience to take over.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.



### Climate Change

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Climate change is a reality and poses a significant challenge for this province. Alberta Liberals believe government needs to act in good faith to reduce Alberta's carbon footprint. To the Minister of Environment. The minister's federal counterpart just came out with a target of 17 per cent reduction by 2020. How is Alberta going to participate in Canada meeting those targets?

2:10

**Mr. Renner:** Mr. Speaker, Alberta is going to participate in Canada meeting those targets by continuing to do what we're already doing: by continuing to lead the way; by using the legislation that we already have in place in this province, that no other province has, quite frankly, that has mandatory reductions for large industrial emitters; like the announcement that we had at noon today, when we formed a partnership with our municipalities, put \$2 million into a centre of excellence program so that municipalities can work to achieve reductions of their carbon footprint. Alberta will do its part.

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

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you. Again to the same minister. Given that the feds have moved to hard caps, at some point the minister will have to stop dithering around with intensity emissions and put in real caps to meet the federal targets. When is this going to happen?

**Mr. Renner:** Mr. Speaker, the issue of hard caps versus intensity caps is something that is often the subject of much debate. But I remind the member that whether it's intensity or whether it's hard caps, the fact of the matter is that the legislation that we have in Alberta requires real reductions of CO<sub>2</sub> on the part of industry. In the hard cap world, the European world, in case the member hasn't noticed, there are actually allowances built into that system for growth. So whether you call it intensity or whether you call it hard cap, the fact of the matter is that you have to allow for growth. That's what our system does.

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

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. As a result of the government not having their act together on tailings ponds, on reclamation, on wetlands, on emissions, on the health of our northern aboriginal population, our international reputation is getting hammered, and our economy is being affected. When is the government going to ramp up Alberta's environmental performance?

**Mr. Renner:** Mr. Speaker, that is the job that I have on a day-to-day basis. There is not a day that goes by that we are not pushing the envelope, that we are not improving the technology, improving the performance. That being said, let's not overlook the tremendous amount of work that's already in place. This is the most highly regulated industry in all of the world. That can improve and will improve, and it will do it under the stewardship of this government.

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

### Alberta Initiative for School Improvement

**Mr. Fawcett:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Approximately \$572 million have been put into the Alberta initiative for school improvement since 2002. What I've heard from a lot of teachers and

students and parents is that this money takes teachers out of the classroom and puts them into administrative or management-type roles. I'm curious as to what value taxpayers and students are receiving through this program. To the Minister of Education: are there any quantitative measurements in place to measure the outcomes of the AISI program?

**Mr. Hancock:** Mr. Speaker, first of all, let me say that we're celebrating the 10th anniversary of the AISI program. It has been an outstanding success for the Alberta education system. All AISI projects must meet criteria and requirements set out by the Education Partners Steering Committee, which is comprised of government, teachers, school authorities, parents, and educational institutions. I can tell you that there are very, very few circumstances where the process of AISI would take teachers out of the classroom and put money into administration. It's about teachers in the classroom doing applied research, and they're doing it very well.

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

**Mr. Fawcett:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not sure that happens all the time.

To the same minister: what measurable improvements in student outcomes can be attributed to the AISI program?

**Mr. Hancock:** Well, Mr. Speaker, there are hundreds of examples of AISI projects which have improved results in literacy, in numeracy, in First Nations, Métis, and Inuit education practices, in distance learning, in student engagement, just to name a few. All results from the 10-year history are available publicly on the Education website. We have compiled reports and done studies on the various sectors of the AISI research to show, first of all, its impact, and secondly, to be able to share it so that the results of those projects can be used by other people.

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

**Mr. Fawcett:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A couple weeks ago the minister spoke to the Calgary Association of Parents and School Councils and indicated that it was important for government to maximize its finite resources. Again to the Minister of Education: has any cost-benefit analysis been done to determine if AISI is indeed the best value per dollar as compared to something as, let's say, reducing class sizes or simply just increasing the base instructional grants to school boards?

**Mr. Hancock:** Mr. Speaker, it's always necessary to learn how to do things better. You can learn how to do things better by doing research on the job; applied research is a very effective tool. It's more than just about money to schools. It empowers educators to be involved in the evolution of teaching and learning and learning how to do things better and then sharing that learning. They have to be able to take risks. Not all AISI projects succeed. If all of them succeeded, we wouldn't be pushing the envelope hard enough and far enough. So it's important. We've done a 10-year review, and what came back from that 10-year review, I'll just say one thing: world-class, world-leading example of a system-wide educational strategy that inspires teachers and administrators. That's the succinct statement that I can give you from the review that says that AISI is working for Albertans.

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

### Funding for Children in Care

(continued)

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Child intervention services suffered a debilitating \$27 million cut in this week's budget. Essential services like child protection, family supports, and assistance for families providing permanent homes to children and youth are the programs that will suffer. To the Minister of Children and Youth Services: given that Alberta already has one of the highest per capita populations of children in custody in Canada, why has the minister further reduced in-home support for children and their families?

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

**Mrs. Fritz:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I mentioned to you earlier in the Assembly, it really is about early intervention, and the intervention area of the budget is multidimensional. We have some very good organizations in the province. Most recently in Calgary we had the FASD Conference, 600 participants, and every one of those people in that room worked with agencies in some way, whether it was policing, psychologists, health care with nurses, psychiatrists, just a number of people working together for that early intervention, to go in and assist that family so that the child does not need to be taken into care. That's cost-effective.

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

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like the hon. minister to go back in time to her former career and recall the times when she physically patched up broken families. I would like to see that type of compassion demonstrated with families within Children and Youth Services.

This government is full of mixed priorities and mixed messages. Can the minister clarify how these proposed cuts reflect the government's commitment to protect the most vulnerable Albertans?

**Mrs. Fritz:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't want you to be misled into thinking that there are cuts throughout this whole budget because that's just not the case. There have been some cost-effective measures with the budget, which we've been asked for; all ministries were over the past year. I can tell you very clearly that the early intervention side of the budget, where the reduction is going to occur, is because it is cost-effective with what we've seen with the good programs over the past year that are showing really strong results. Tomorrow you will see the announcement of the triple-P program, which is the positive parenting program through parent link centres. They're making a real difference out there in the community.

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

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you. I would just like the minister to note that it is considerably less expensive to maintain the children and support them within their homes rather than to institutionalize them. There are a number of loving foster care parents out there – and I thank the families that provide that support – but it's less expensive to look after them within their families.

This ministry has been in crisis for years. Why should Albertans trust that these cuts won't bring about further decreases in the quality of already constrained services?

**Mrs. Fritz:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to see that the member agrees with me about the early intervention piece where you actually

assist families with positive parenting skills, which the community is coming together to do. We just had the 100th anniversary yesterday of the Bissell Centre, and that's very much a part of their work. That's where you have the success of the family, and you don't take the children or youth into care. Foster parents: I agree that, you know, that's a very important program in this ministry, and that area is being increased by over \$900,000.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, followed by the hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

### 2:20 Airdrie-Chestermere Constituency Issues

**Mr. Anderson:** Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Dylan Nielson is a constituent of mine who suffered from a brain cyst that caused life-threatening seizures and made him so light sensitive that he couldn't even leave his house. His condition was initially misdiagnosed, and despite subsequent referrals from his family doc, specialists repeatedly refused him a second opinion, citing the initial misdiagnosis. Dylan was able to go the U.S. for treatment, and the seizures and light sensitivity have stopped. Unfortunately, the Nielsons have a huge medical bill that they can't afford. To the health minister: would you be willing to sit down with the Nielson family to see if there's anything this government can do to help them out?

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Absolutely, Mr. Speaker, and I'd be pleased to have the hon. member join me in that meeting.

**Mr. Anderson:** Thank you, Minister. That's very good of you.

On another topic, the city of Airdrie has been forced into divesting itself of its prized integrated fire and ambulance service due to what looks like bungling by some agenda-driven bureaucrats at Alberta Health Services. This would be very disappointing for Airdrie-area residents. To the minister again: would you be willing to meet with the mayor and CEO of Airdrie to see if we can work out a solution that is acceptable to all parties involved?

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Mr. Speaker, there is an integrated ambulance plan for ground ambulances, and Alberta Health Services has set some new, improved standards to protect safety and quality of delivery of services. In some other municipalities, perhaps the one being referenced, they are fortunate enough to have a separate fire department, and in some cases staff serve in both the ambulance sector and the fire sector. What we're trying to do is ensure that the standards aren't compromised by having staff vacate one position to service the other. So we're working that out, but yes, I'd be happy to meet with them as well.

**Mr. Anderson:** Thanks, Mr. Minister. I appreciate that. No further questions. Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

### Oil Sands Global Image

**Mr. Johnson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've now read in a few papers some troubling news that two American companies are boycotting Alberta's oil as part of their new policies designed to reduce their carbon footprints. The southbound flow of Alberta oil, which represents a fifth of all U.S. oil imports, is obviously crucial for our province and their economy as well. My question is to the Minister of Energy: what is the government doing to respond to the

actions of these corporations and set the record straight about energy from the oil sands?

**Mr. Liepert:** Well, Mr. Speaker, for starters, that story appeared a couple of days ago in the great central Canadian bastion of Liberal propaganda, the *Toronto Star*. What has happened, actually, is typical. Two days later one of the companies issued a statement – that happened to be today – where they said: characterizations that we have rejected any particular fuels are not accurate because we're not in a position to do so. I think that this is just another one of those particular examples of where, quite frankly, business might make some decisions, and then consumers will express their views on those decisions, and it'll all work out.

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

**Mr. Johnson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think it's important that we get the factual information out, though, and based on studies by T.J. McCann, Cambridge Energy Research, and the Alberta Energy Research Institute, the wheel-to-well emissions from our bitumen are equal to or less than oil from other jurisdictions, including California's heavy oil and oil from Nigeria and Venezuela, to name a few. To the Minister of Environment: what is our government doing to make sure that the full life cycle of emissions is calculated and recognized when comparing energy from Alberta to other producing jurisdictions?

**Mr. Renner:** Well, Mr. Speaker, the member is absolutely correct. Our oil sands oil does compare very favourably with a number of other alternate sources, including Venezuelan and California thermal, even taking into account that 80 per cent of emissions that are derived from the combustion of fossil fuel come out of the tailpipe and are not attributable to the source. That being said, as I've said many times in this House, this government is committed to ensuring that we not only talk about our existing record but that we have continuous improvement to ensure that we reduce that footprint.

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

**Mr. Johnson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Another interesting piece of information that some people, including the opposition, tend to overlook is that industries in Alberta's oil sands are investing in cogeneration, producing power without incremental emissions, effectively generating low-emission or no-emission power from the oil sands. Constituents say that these should be used as part of the calculation of our oil sands carbon footprint. To the same minister: how will you ensure that these efforts will be fairly cited and recognized to further the development of our oil sands?

**Mr. Renner:** Well, Mr. Speaker, that's a complex issue that we're spending a great deal of time on right now. We're trying to come up with an accurate way of determining what are the CO<sub>2</sub> savings as a result of cogeneration, but most importantly intuitively we know that cogeneration is the right thing to do. We need to ensure that whatever kind of regulatory regime we put in place gives the right signals, gives the proper incentives to encourage industry to make these very valuable investments.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

### PDD Funding

**Ms Pastoor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The plans that the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports has for the persons with developmental disabilities program are not clear, making the future of this program quite uncertain. To the minister: what was the minister's reasoning for creating a new PDD eligibility criterion, and what evidence was used in its creation?

**Mrs. Jablonski:** Mr. Speaker, it's very important to me that every Albertan with a developmental disability is treated fairly and equally across the province. The eligibility requirement that the member refers to has not been changed. What we have changed is that instead of having it just in policy, it's now in regulation. The regulation provides more clarity and consistency throughout the province, and that was my purpose for putting it into place.

**Ms Pastoor:** Why is the minister making all PDD-funded individuals undergo reassessment with the new eligibility criterion?

**Mrs. Jablonski:** Mr. Speaker, the eligibility criterion is not new. Any person that is PDD funded and is eligible for our supports will not have to go through any new assessments or program. What we have that is new is something that's called the supports intensity scale. This is a new assessment tool that we are using to ensure once again that all persons with disabilities in the province of Alberta are treated the same from north to south, east to west.

**Ms Pastoor:** Will the minister guarantee that all people currently on PDD will not be denied PDD supports after the reassessments have been finished?

**Mrs. Jablonski:** Mr. Speaker, any person in Alberta with developmental disabilities who is eligible for our funding supports and services will receive the supports and services that they are eligible for, and if they are receiving the correct supports, nothing will change.

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

### Northtown Seniors' Housing

**Mr. Olson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Shortly after my election almost two years ago I was contacted by a number of people from Wetaskiwin about a complex called the Northtown condominiums. These condominiums were inherited by Alberta Health Services from its predecessor the David Thompson health region. Many of those units had been empty, and they now have been empty for several years, and I'm wondering why. My question is for the Minister of Health and Wellness. Can he advise as to what's being done to ensure that these units are made available to people in Wetaskiwin who want to live there?

**Mr. Zwodzesky:** Mr. Speaker, let me first say thank you to the residents of Wetaskiwin for their patience. The sale has not yet been finalized. There are some details that we still have to go through, and that includes looking at some bylaw amendments that are necessary. However, once those details are finalized, hon. member, you could see residents moving into that facility within four to six weeks after the details are sorted out.

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

**Mr. Olson:** Thank you. I have one supplemental. I've been told that there are as many as 19 units sitting empty, many of them for a long time. I've been asked often about the costs of maintaining these units while they sit empty. I'm wondering if the minister can share any information that he might have in terms of the cost of maintaining these units.

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Mr. Speaker, there are some nominal fees associated with keeping those units, and those nominal fees include things like condo fees, for example. The situation is not ideal, but it is solvable. I asked for this process to be looked at when I first heard about it a couple of weeks ago, hon. member, but I thank you for raising it here now, which will help accelerate the acceleration, and we'll get there.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

### Severance Payments

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Treasury Board budget estimates forecast \$30 million in separation payments this fiscal year. My first question is to the President of the Treasury Board. What is the \$30 million in separation payments for?

**Mr. Snelgrove:** Well, Mr. Speaker, generally when we put aside money for separation payments, it's to pay people that are leaving government.

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you. That certainly confirms that there are plans by this government to lay civil servants off.

Again to the President of the Treasury Board: how are you going to calculate these separation payments fairly given that Paddy Meade, when she left Alberta Health Services after 10 months' employment, was paid \$1.3 million in severance?

2:30

**Mr. Snelgrove:** Mr. Speaker, we have a very consistent approach to the employees that work on behalf of the Alberta government. It is certainly not our pleasure or what we like to do to have to narrow down our number of employees that work for the Alberta government, but there are times that change, there are processes that we do better, there are IT improvements that we're able to do better, and occasionally people on our staff, both management and union, are let go. We very fairly deal with these people on a basis that's predetermined by their agreement with us.

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you. Again to the same minister, Mr. Speaker: how is the government going to calculate these separation payments fairly after providing Jack Davis, the CEO of the Calgary health region, with a \$1.6 million severance package and a \$22,490-a-month pension for life?

**Mr. Snelgrove:** Mr. Speaker, that severance was given by the Calgary regional health authority, which is one darn good reason why we needed to bring all of these regions under one management. I'm sure that people were dealt with separately. There's no one in this House, I would presume, and probably very few Albertans that

believe that some of the people that were let go earned or deserved those severances, but unfortunately when deals are made and contracts are signed, then you have to live up to them, and you go forward, not backwards.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

### Highway 55

**Mrs. Leskiw:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Highway 55 runs through the northern part of my constituency. It is the lifeline of my constituents who work in the Cold Lake oil sands. The section of highway that my constituents are most concerned about is an eight-mile stretch that doesn't have any shoulders. My first question to the Minister of Transportation: why was this eight-mile stretch missed when the rest of the highway from Lac La Biche to Cold Lake has shoulders?

**Mr. Ouellette:** Well, Mr. Speaker, we recognize the importance of widening highway 55 and all other highways in Alberta. I do have to say, though, that this MLA, the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, has done a great job championing this project. We realize that there is large-truck traffic on that highway and that widening is important. My department is currently completing the engineering and design work. In fact, we've purchased about half of the required rights-of-way, and I've asked them to try to look at this project to see if we can move it along.

**Mrs. Leskiw:** My next question is to the same minister. This eight-mile stretch is a huge safety issue for my constituents. It is the number one concern for commercial truckers in my area. It has a school on it, which means school buses pick up and drop off students, it has logging trucks because of the logging business, it has tankers, and of course it has farmers that live on both sides of highway 55. What would it cost the government to widen this eight-mile stretch?

**Mr. Ouellette:** Mr. Speaker, on this particular stretch of highway it's difficult to determine that exact cost as we're still trying to work through the design and the detailing. But I have to tell you that when we used to always produce what we thought it was going to cost to build something, that seemed to be what the prices came in at. When we started not telling people what we thought it would cost, we started getting better bids, so we have no intentions of telling people what these bids should be.

**Mrs. Leskiw:** My next question is to the same minister. I've been campaigning for the completion of this project for the past two years. My predecessor had been campaigning for it for several years before that. How long do my constituents have to wait for this dangerous eight-mile stretch to be widened?

**Mr. Ouellette:** Mr. Speaker, I want to be very clear here. These highways are very, very important to us. When she says that it's a danger, safety is very, very important on the highways in Alberta. We plan on doing what we can, but we have to work within a budget. We have criteria out there that we adjust all our roads against, and at one point in time hers will be on the list. We're doing what we can to move it forward.

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

### Environmental Monitoring of Oil Sands

**Ms Notley:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The rate of bitumen extraction needs to almost double over the next three years, or this government will never balance a budget again. Now, added to this house of cards is the government's so-called plan to increase monitoring in the Fort McMurray area by not adding one single cent to compliance and monitoring and, instead, cutting it in every other area in the province. To the Minister of Environment: how can the minister stand by as development almost doubles without increasing environmental monitoring and compliance and protection at the same rate?

**Mr. Renner:** Mr. Speaker, there are really two components to monitoring. One is the monitoring that is done by Alberta Environment, and basically that's to make sure we keep everyone honest. We have opportunity to do ambient air quality and water quality that is downstream from industrial operations. We also have as a requirement of an operating approval the monitoring by the developer, whoever that developer happens to be. So if there is an increase in the amount of development in the area, it will by extension result in an increase in monitoring.

**Ms Notley:** Well, Mr. Speaker, monitoring and enforcement measures have never been adequate in this province, so it's no wonder that international operations are discussing the possibility of boycotting the oil sands. It's interesting because the reality is that the environmental integrity of oil sands development will always be questioned as long as this minister continues to allow industry to police itself instead of investing in comprehensive, effective, independent oversight. To the same minister: why are you fighting for balance on a scale that is weighted so heavily in favour of oil and gas profits at the cost of our environment?

**Mr. Renner:** Mr. Speaker, the issue of monitoring is one that I think gets misconstrued. As I've said and as I just said in the answer to the previous question, there are requirements within the operating approvals that industry must monitor and must report the results of that monitoring. In addition to that, there are spot checks that are done on a periodic and on an informal basis. These are not preannounced. These are like an unannounced visit to ensure that the monitoring is being done in an appropriate way. Over and above all of that, we do some of our own monitoring, that confirms or denies that the results we're getting from industry are accurate.

**Ms Notley:** Well, Mr. Speaker, you're going to be left with fewer unannounced visits if you don't change the budget, and meanwhile you're leaving the fox guarding the chicken coop. It's not going to work.

The budget was called Striking the Right Balance, but an honest title would be: Hoping the Oil Sands Will Cover the Bills; We'll Deal with the Consequences Later, If Ever. How can you stand by and support a budget that cuts the environment as a whole when the need to protect it has never been greater?

**Mr. Renner:** Mr. Speaker, I'll let the minister of finance address the issue of what the budget does or does not presume in the future, but I can answer on behalf of my ministry how we are going to continue to ensure that we protect the environment despite the fact that, like a number of other ministries, we have had to find some efficiencies within our system. Those efficiencies do not involve the direct service to environmental protection. There are a number of ways that we have found to reduce within our department, and I can assure this member that none of them will compromise our ability to do our job.

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

### Alberta Health Services Board

**Mr. Hinman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The former health minister disbanded the regional health boards without any transition plan in place. A year later he cobbled together a superboard from a temporary board and paid out approximately \$18 million in gold-plated severance packages to 30 health care officials. Would the president of the treasury please advise this Assembly and all Albertans how many of these officials received a new job with Alberta Health Services or any other government position?

**Mr. Snelgrove:** Mr. Speaker, I wouldn't know that answer. Certainly, any employment that has been offered through my department has been absolutely zero, but I would let the minister of health answer that question.

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Could I just augment that and say that the new provincial board has effectively saved us between \$600 million and \$700 million so far.

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

**Mr. Hinman:** Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. Hopefully, they'll do some research to find out whether it's happened or not.

The Minister's Advisory Committee on Health was assembled because of obvious flaws with the current health superboard and poor management decisions that were having a negative impact on patient care. In the interests of all Albertans will the new health minister replace the centralized superboard bureaucracy with local hospital administrators and give them the power and the authority needed to run the hospital in the best interests of their own communities?

2:40

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Mr. Speaker, we had a good system for the time when we had the 17 health authorities and the nine, but, you know, having one provincial board for the health system has already proven beneficial. Let me give you three quick examples. Common procurement is one of them. Stopping the issue of doctor poaching, as it was sometimes referred to, is another. We stopped the bidding war, in other words. Having a centralized payroll system is saving the system between \$600 million and \$700 million annually. Between \$600 million and \$700 million annually. We think it's the right direction, but we also have local health advisory committees that are feeding into the system, so local input is still there.

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

**Mr. Hinman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's interesting that of each of those problems he talked about – procurement would be very easy to do without a superboard. Encroachment: easy to eliminate that problem with proper management. It's not acceptable. The hundreds of millions that they're saving – we used to have volunteer hospital boards that looked after the local hospitals. Why doesn't the minister trust local hospital administrators to act in the best interests of the people in their own communities?

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Mr. Speaker, what we've done is we've standardized a lot of things by centralizing them. We now have consistent stat gathering and consistent statistical data reporting, which helps us speed things up, such as the Alberta wait-list registry, so you can

go back into the computer and punch up wherever you might want to go for a particular type of surgery. That system has been down for a while because of one central problem, and that was that everybody was doing their own thing locally and doing it very well, as the member has said. Unfortunately, they were reporting things and collecting data in their own ways. We now have standardized and centralized that, and we'll have a lot more of that consistency of purpose coming along as a result of centralizing it.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, I'd like to thank you for your cooperation again today. We were able to recognize 18 different members. There were 102 questions and answers: 12 came from opposition members and six from private government members.

Before I call Orders of the Day, it's quite amazing, in listening to all the members' statements today, all the enthusiasm that one could get for this particular weekend in 2010: the opening of the Olympics, which will put Canada's face before the whole world; Black History Month celebrations this weekend; for all your sweeties, Valentine's Day on the 14th; Family Day on the 15th; Chinese New Year; Vietnamese Tet. I'll tell you; I can get quite excited listening.

### Orders of the Day

#### 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 10: Mr. VanderBurg]

**The Speaker:** Who am I recognizing to participate in the Speech from the Throne? The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

**Mr. Danyluk:** Well, thank you very much. It is indeed an honour to rise and speak to the Speech from the Throne. Building roads and schools and hospitals and public infrastructure to meet the needs of our growing economy and population is a priority for this government. Alberta is known for having the most advanced public infrastructure in North America, and yes, Mr. Speaker, we will fix those lights, and we will try to do it very soon so that you are not in the dark. While building modern infrastructure to meet Alberta's needs, it is vital to look beyond the bricks and mortar. It is what happens inside our buildings that is critical.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans and the services that we deliver to them are our first priority, and we are always striving for the best way to deliver Albertans' needs. The world has been in the deepest recession we have seen in half a century. Through good planning Alberta has a better outlook than most. This is due to our carefully planned fiscal advantages, including low taxes and nearly \$25 billion we have saved and invested during good times. Our province is in an excellent position for a strong recovery. Our Premier's strategy for economic recovery includes continuing to strengthen our infrastructure in all regions of the province. This infrastructure is what will increase our competitiveness in a global economy.

Mr. Speaker, our universities, our hospitals, our schools attract people and business to this province. On my first day on the job I had the honour of attending the openings of three schools in the Grande Prairie area: Hythe regional school, Alexander Forbes

school, St. Theresa Catholic school. I spoke to teachers, to students, and to parents about their new and newly renovated schools. I asked them what it was like to work and to learn in these new facilities. They were happy about their new schools, and the feedback came in in regard to their high-performance classrooms, which they described as incredible. They love the Smart boards, they love the acoustics, and they love the new space, that has both comfort and versatility. In these modern environments our students thrive. By providing places that students want to go to every day, we inspire and support learning and creativity. This is why it is important to continue building schools in this province and to continue building them well.

Looking ahead, Mr. Speaker, our made-in-Alberta schools alternative procurement project is a prime example of government's innovative solutions for delivering much-needed schools. These schools will provide first-class learning environments for students and staff. Classrooms are wired to accommodate the latest learning technologies. They are energy efficient and high quality and have lots of natural light. This innovative building project has already received national and provincial recognition, including six prestigious awards. The positive feedback and the success of the first project has led to the second one.

Altogether, Albertans will gain 32 new advanced schools in six Alberta communities two years faster than if we had used traditional methods. Mr. Speaker, let me repeat: two years faster than if we had used traditional methods. While these schools are leading edge and comfortable, they are also more economical. They save taxpayer dollars on design and on construction, and schools get built faster.

The Speech from the Throne also highlighted the government of Alberta's commitment to caring for our most vulnerable. Alberta's population is growing and aging. Albertans are also living longer. The increasing number of Albertan seniors will impact how new seniors' facilities are planned. Access to quality seniors' care is the foundation of our government's continuing care strategy. When I talk to seniors in my constituency, many tell me they want to live independently. They want to remain in their communities even as their needs change. They want to live with their partners. Basically, what they want are choices that help preserve their independence, quality of life, and personal dignity.

We know that supporting and enabling seniors and those with disabilities to age in place improves their quality of life and life expectancy. However, we want to go one step further so that Albertans can age in the right place. This is not about buildings; this is about what happens inside buildings. It is about creating a facility that enables the best continuing care. It is about creating support. It is about creating a place our seniors are proud to call home. Ensuring that our seniors are well cared for demonstrates the importance of what we're trying to achieve and why we are trying to do it.

2:50

The Alberta capital bonds will be introduced for sale later this month. They will only be available in Alberta, for Albertans. Proceeds raised through the sale of the bonds will go towards building accommodations for our seniors, accommodations that provide Albertans with choice and flexibility to meet the Premier's vision of supporting our seniors as they age in the right place. Providing high-quality space for our seniors delivers on our Premier's commitments of building tomorrow. Albertans are innovators. Albertans are proud of our province, and Albertans want to invest in their future.

When we build, we build for people who will use those facilities. Albertans as taxpayers must also be respected. Government has introduced a number of strategies to build and maintain public

infrastructure for the best return on their tax dollars. We take advantage of opportunities to ensure good value for taxpayers and deliver infrastructure in a timely, cost-effective, and efficient manner. While many jurisdictions are cutting back and growing their infrastructure deficits, we're continuing to innovate and build. We know we have a responsibility to build wisely to get the most out of our investments, and we are. Through careful financial and capital planning we are getting the most out of each infrastructure dollar spent and supporting tens of thousands of jobs across the province. We are doing this because a strong provincial infrastructure is the foundation for long-term economic growth and for Albertans.

Investing in our infrastructure is a direct investment in improving Albertans' daily quality of life. In building new schools we are helping to educate. In building new hospitals we are keeping Albertans healthy. In building new seniors' accommodations we are letting seniors age in dignity. My top priority is to ensure that Albertans have the public buildings they need today and into the future. This is a priority of our Premier, for my ministry, and for the government of Alberta. We have the responsibility to plan now for the infrastructure needs of tomorrow, and building tomorrow begins today.

Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Would anybody like to ask a question of the minister or make a comment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm just wondering if the minister in his comments on infrastructure can tell us – and I don't have the information in front of me – if the government's inventory of the condition of provincial roads is showing an improvement or a deterioration over the next few years, the number of roads that are in good shape or poor shape, and I forget the middle category.

**Mr. Danyluk:** Well, of course, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member opposite knows that roads fall under Transportation, but if I can take the liberty to comment, to say that this government is investing \$7.2 billion in infrastructure this year, and that includes schools, hospitals. It includes roads. It includes the infrastructure that this province is very much being a leader in, ensuring not only that we have the infrastructure but that it helps provide the jobs and that it helps provide a stable economic future for this province.

**The Speaker:** Others?

We'll go to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

**Dr. Sherman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to respond to the Speech from the Throne. I'd like to start by thanking and congratulating the hon. Lieutenant Governor Kwong and his amazing wife, Mary, for serving and representing our great province in a dignified and honourable fashion.

Mr. Speaker, from when I was first elected, much has changed. We're in the midst of a world economic crisis. We've had H1N1. Hopes and dreams across the world have been shattered, and many in this world suffer from despair. Our province has been hit particularly hard economically due to our natural resource revenue declining at a time when we were in the midst of catching up to our recent economic boom. The truest test of the character of a people is not how you fare during the good times; it's what you do during the tough times.

Now, the Speech from the Throne applies to Albertans and to my constituents in Edmonton-Meadowlark. I'd like to touch on a few

points. One is Alberta's fiscal advantage. The major advantage that we have going through these tough times is that, one, we have no debt. No province in this nation can say that. Secondly, we have money in the bank in our RRSP account. No province in this nation can say that. Thirdly, we have money in a savings account, our sustainability fund, to help with the priorities that matter to people during the difficult times, priorities such as looking after educating our children, caring for our seniors, looking after our vulnerable, and providing services on the human-sector side. We do have challenges, Mr. Speaker, but these are challenges everybody in this nation and everybody in this world faces.

At the same time, on the economic side we have an economic climate with the lowest possible taxes to encourage the spirit of entrepreneurship in this province, to encourage small business, and to create what matters most to people, jobs, j-o-b-s. We have the lowest unemployment rate in the nation. During the tough time we still had a hundred thousand people flock here in search of jobs and hope so that they could care for their families.

The second issue is building safe communities. Safety is one of the main issues for the good people of Edmonton-Meadowlark. We have to fight crime. We have to get tough on crime, on the bad guys. There are many people in Alberta, many people who are going through difficult times, and they make mistakes in life. Many of them have interactions with the health system and the criminal system. It might be because of homelessness. The root causes of homelessness are addiction and mental health issues and sometimes poverty. Are these hardened criminals? I'd say that these are Albertans who are having a tough time, and we've got to look after them. That's that commitment of building affordable housing units, getting our mental patients the help that they require and the wraparound services that they require, marrying mental health and addictions so that we can provide better, more effective care because many times patients have comorbidities. Not only do they have a mental health problem, but they have an addiction problem, and they also have a medical problem. In breaking down silos and barriers, we can address these issues.

The third issue is an increasingly competitive global marketplace. We need to continue to foster the Alberta dream, the dream of entrepreneurship, that if you want to work hard and work smart, you can achieve anything you want. Sometimes it requires a little bit of luck, but the two main characters are hard work and smart work and then to be in an atmosphere where those dreams can be encouraged, and that's what this province does. I can say this: part of that is addressed with a good education.

Let's talk about regulations. We can overregulate or underregulate. Really, what we need to talk about are good regulations to enable dreams to happen versus disabling dreams from happening. We're a major supplier, a safe supplier of energy and minerals and resources to the global marketplace. Bill 1, the Alberta Competitiveness Act, will address and make sure that we are the most competitive in this nation with respect to the energy sector and our resource sector.

The fourth issue is environmental stewardship. We do have to be careful with our environment in this world. I believe that in Alberta we took that leadership with, first, the intensity targets. I think there is more that needs to be done. We have solar power, wind power. Carbon capture and storage is one solution, and there's individual responsibility. I think we all as individual Albertans can play a major role in improving the environment of the great province that we live in. We can be a beacon of hope to other, developing nations in helping them with their environmental challenges such as India and China and other nations that are up and coming who want to have the life that we have here.

3:00

Mr. Speaker, the most important thing I'd like to talk about. You know, I had mentioned a quote by Martin Luther King Jr.: life begins to end the day we become silent about things that matter. In this House today I'd like to break my silence about the number one issue that affects not only our great province but also this great nation and many of the G-8 nations, and that issue is health care. Dealing with health care is actually beyond health care. Health care is the symptom, not the problem. The wealth of our nation depends on the health of our nation, the fact that we're competing in a global marketplace. The health of our workforce determines the economic productivity of our business sector.

I just have to give you, I think, evidence and examples of the best way to deal with this. A good friend of mine – I won't mention his name – went to the United States, fell off a bus, and broke his ankle and needed a cast. He was in Florida. He was hospitalized for two days, got a cast, and got an X-ray. No operation, no intravenous, no CAT scans. Guess what his bill was? Take a guess. Thirty-seven thousand dollars U.S. – \$37,000 U.S. – at a private hospital. Our insurance plan had to get the lawyers involved, and we whittled that down to \$9,000 plus the legal fees. You know what his bill would have been had he come to our hospital, the Royal Alex? Six hundred bucks. We never would have put him in the hospital because he probably didn't need to stay in the hospital. Six hundred bucks. I think we can deliver health care more efficiently here.

In the U.S.A. our good cousins south of the border spend an average of \$7,500 U.S. per person on health care. Here's the outcome: 60 per cent obesity rates, and their life expectancy is less than ours. That's after 50 million hard-working Americans, hard workers, have no insurance. They just get medicaid when they end up sick in the emergency department. Then they get very expensive care.

This has affected the economic productivity of every major corporation who is competing against the Indians and the Chinas of this world. They have healthy, productive employees who don't get paid too much. Here we have unhealthy, unproductive employees because of their health. There's a reason that there is an economic catastrophe south of the border: health care. Health care is their major issue, and part of health care is the drug costs and the legal costs.

My health insurance, my legal liability insurance to work at an inner-city trauma centre here, is about 245 bucks a month. In the U.S. I'm sure that figure would be at least 10 to 15 times more.

In Canada we spend \$4,200 to \$4,400 per person per year on average in this nation. Our outcome is that we have 30 per cent obesity rates. Life expectancy is 78.2 years for men and 82.7 years for women according to the 2008 census figures. But the challenge that we have in this nation is – actually, times to get access to care have been improving.

Now, here's a critique of our health system in this nation. We in this nation have talked about the Canada Health Act. We have this Canada Health Act. The five principles are public administration, comprehensiveness, universality, portability, and accessibility, but access to care has gotten worse. In this nation, in Manitoba, Nova Scotia, Ontario, many of these provinces, in their budgets health care is 50 per cent.

My comments are based on the fact that I've worked for 17 years, talked to many experts in this province, this country, and this world on what we need to do. This is what we're doing. Mr. Speaker, number one is that we need a vision. That vision was articulated in A Foundation for Alberta's Health System. It's a comprehensive document developed by experts in health care, experts in safety, experts from this province, and this report has been accepted.

The number two issue is to actually fund health care. We in this province have made a decision to fund health care.

The number three issue is really how we're going to deliver health care. I believe we can deliver it efficiently. That's why we went to one region. Health care is so superspecialized that you simply cannot provide every service in every hospital in every town, let alone every province. There are fantastic ideas that happened in nine different regions. We're taking the best of the regions to apply those standards province-wide.

We go to one electronic health record. Fantastic work was done in Calgary in bone marrow transplants. Great work in Capital health in cardiac transplants. We were the model in health care in the nation with the electronic record, and that record is being standardized. We did Bill 52 last year. We're going to hook up all the family doctors' offices, get the records so we don't have to keep repeating tests all the time, but we must do it while protecting the public's privacy. It was a collaborative decision made by an all-party committee. I believe we came to reasonable compromises in helping protect privacy while we work on the record.

Now, Mr. Speaker, this is really about creating the best performing publicly funded health care system not just in this country, I would say in this world. We have an opportunity to have the best publicly funded health care system on this planet. For that, I would first start by thanking the Member for Calgary-West for creating the opportunity, having the political will and the courage to withstand the criticism to allow us to do this by going to one region.

Secondly, I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford and Ms Prowse for leading this conversation and bringing out this report.

Lastly, I'd like to thank the Premier and the hon. minister from Edmonton-Mill Creek for taking this baton forward and working on the funding part.

Mr. Speaker, when I was a representative of the emergency docs – and I still work every Sunday – when I used to lecture across the country, my friends across the country used to say: we in the other parts of the country have wonderful ideas, but you people in Alberta actually have the courage to do something about it, the political courage to actually do something about it.

Mr. Speaker, the nation is watching. I lay a challenge to every health minister in this nation. I lay a challenge to the Prime Minister of this nation to adopt this, to revise the Canada Health Act and stop rationing health care. Let's deliver it efficiently. Let's deliver it effectively. Let's have evidence-based health care. Let's concentrate on outcomes: what do we do with the money we spend, and what outcome do we get? Let's do it together with the people that actually work on the front lines. Let's start by asking Albertans and Canadians what they expect from their health care system, what they want, how we're going to get there. We've got to get there with them coming at our side.

I lay a challenge to our good friends south of the border to pass that bill. Those 50 million people who are not insured are workers. That's got to make the economic productivity of the labour workforce even worse. Mr. Speaker, this issue is way beyond health care, way beyond the proportion of your budget. This issue will affect us economically. It has affected us economically because now the borders have opened up.

We have not enough young people coming up. We have a lot of seniors. It's not the seniors alone. It's their kids and their grandkids when they went from active lifestyles to inactive lifestyles. Our childhood obesity rates in this nation have gone the wrong way.

The one thing that's gotten better is smoking rates. We're down to 19 per cent from, I believe, 50 or 40 per cent from when Mr. Marlboro used to smoke, and guess how he died. Lung cancer. All



his buddies had heart disease 15 or 20 years before their mother and father would have had it.

You know what? Their kids', their grandkids' obesity rates have gone from 20 to 29 per cent. These kids are having diabetes at the age of 10, type 2 diabetes. Mental health rates have gone through the roof. One hundred per cent of our kids eat too much salt. They don't move enough. They move less than ever. They eat more than ever and eat the wrong stuff more than ever.

Yes, we need more doctors and nurses. Yes, we need to run the system more efficiently. But you know what? We need fewer patients.

3:10

**The Speaker:** Thank you, hon. member, but there's an opportunity now for 29(2)(a). The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

**Mr. Vandermeer:** Yes. I'd like to ask the hon. member – you said something that sparked my attention. You said that health is going to be the number one issue in the world and here as well. Now, I would think that the economy would be the number one issue in the world because if we don't have a healthy economy, how are you going to pay for health and education? Could you answer that for me?

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

**Dr. Sherman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the hon. member for that question. In fact, these issues are all intertwined. You're absolutely correct. Jobs are very important, and health is very – they are all intertwined. Health, education, and economic participation: these are the pillars of every society. When we have jobs, we've got to make sure that employees are healthy. But you know what? You could have healthy employees, but they have no jobs. Then they get unhealthy, and they get depressed. So we need it all.

I'd like to thank the hon. member. I'm a doctor, so I'm a little biased. I have to sort of put the health thing a little forward, but you're absolutely correct. Economy is also one of the number one issues.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

**Mr. MacDonald:** Yes, please, Mr. Speaker. I would like to thank the hon. member for his speech. I enjoyed his presentation, and I listened with interest.

First off, I would like to request a copy of the document that he was referring to in his speech. I could see the title from here. I'm surprised. It was A Foundation for Alberta's Health System. It's a document I'm not familiar with, and I sure would appreciate one. I believe I'm going to get one, and I would like to say in advance thank you.

I would also like to ask the hon. member how he feels the activity-based funding formula that was referred to in question period earlier today will ensure that we do not see any more of the billion-dollar deficits that were recently racked up by Alberta Health Services. How will that exactly work?

Thank you.

**Dr. Sherman:** Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank you for another opportunity to answer a good question. Really, the activity-based

formula in simplified terms – there are two ways of funding. One is global budget, which is: here's a lot of money with no performance and accountability measures. Activity-based is – I don't want to use the words "fee for service" because as a doctor I get paid a salary for one day; whether I see zero patients or a hundred patients, I get the same salary. Or another situation: I get paid only if I see patients; if I don't see anyone, I get nothing. Activity-based is really saying: "You know what? If you do X amount of operations, you get X amount of funding. The more you do, the more you get." It's really about performance and efficiency and outcomes, but it's not just simple activity-based based on how much you do. We have to look at quality as well, make sure you have high quality and high performance.

That's my understanding of activity-based funding. The person we really need to ask, the real expert in this, to be honest, is Dr. Duckett, who is the CEO of Alberta Health Services Board.

Thank you.

**Mr. MacDonald:** In the time remaining, quickly, Mr. Speaker, to the hon. member: will an activity-based system create competition between hospitals within Alberta?

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

**Dr. Sherman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'd like to thank the hon. member for another good question. As I mentioned, health care is so superspecialized. We simply cannot provide every service in every hospital or every city or every province even. It's really not about competition. It's about: how can we get every hospital to perform the best that they possibly can?

I see a collaboration between the hospitals. I work at the Royal Alexandra hospital and the U of A hospital. There's no competition. If I have a patient that's suffering and they need specialized care at the U of A, my good friends at the U of A help us out. This is really about delivering good, efficient health care and less about competition. The only competition is how I performed yesterday in my own department. Can I perform better tomorrow in the same department?

But if you have two identical hospitals with two identical services, there is that opportunity for them to – I don't want to use the word "compete." I'd rather use the word "collaborate." But, yes, you can actually assess how one does against the other. Then with the one that doesn't do so well, the other hospital can actually coach them and teach them. We apply these standards and say: look, this is what we're doing better. "Collaboration" is a better word.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

**Dr. Taft:** Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'll begin, as so many members have, with acknowledging the fine work and the wonderful presence and sense of humour and, somehow, a magical combination of humility and pride that the Lieutenant Governor has had. He could always tell a joke and deliver it like nobody else could. I want to acknowledge the work he and his wife did over the last several years.

I'm going to focus in my response to the throne speech on health care since that's a theme this afternoon. The minister is here, and I appreciated the comments from the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. I'll try to take a little bit different approach here.

I do want to just spend a moment on how we got to where we are, from where I see it, with our health care system. I genuinely believe that up until 1993, for the period probably from about '85 to '92 or

'93, Alberta had perhaps the best health care system in the world, and we'd like to restore that. Amazingly, if you actually go back and crunch the numbers, costs were quite flat during that time. We got into a period of terrific upheaval from 1993 onward.

I notice there's a new deputy minister of health in the last couple of weeks. It's worth pointing out that he is – I have the list here – the 12th or 13th deputy minister since 1993. I have the list of all the names. That's just one symptom of how unstable that health care system has been. We've had regional health authorities come and go there, consolidation of boards and then further consolidations. Some were disbanded, and now we're down to one.

We've had really erratic funding. We went from among the highest in the country to the very lowest. We sat at way below the Canadian average from about 1995 to early into the last decade, 2000 and 2001 – I've been studying these numbers recently – and then it's just been a roller coaster ride since. That unstable funding keeps the whole system off of balance. It affects not just buildings – and we are desperately squeezed on the health care infrastructure front – but it also affects, more importantly, staffing. That instability continues to play out.

Many of us were at an AUMA breakfast this morning, and the mayor of Cold Lake, who I'd never met before, stood up and said, you know, as I recall the mayor this morning: "What's going on here? Two or three months ago Dr. Duckett was in our hospital essentially telling staff to leave or to get ready to leave." You know, 18 months ago we were on an aggressive recruiting campaign. Then we went into a hiring freeze. Now we're back into some kind of – well, we're not sure what we're back to, and that was the mayor's question this morning. He quite rightly pointed out that that instability is devastating to morale.

There are a lot of reasons that we are where we are with health care, and I think it's because, frankly, of 17 years of poor management and poor leadership. I can't put it any more bluntly than that. I hope that's come to an end.

I will say this to the minister and to all members, that with the increase of funding proposed in this budget, assuming that goes through, there will be no excuses for anything less than a health system that delivers and delivers on time and at high quality, that runs like a well-oiled Swiss watch. We do not need big increases after what we've seen in this budget; that's for sure.

I think we need to spend a minute on asking ourselves: why are costs soaring? I think one of the reasons, obviously, is the instability. That kind of up and down and up and down is simply inefficient. I also think that there are concerns around an overcentralization in Alberta Health Services. For all the purported savings that we hear the minister talk about, there are also indications that there are much larger problems. I think we want to consider returning to a model where the delivery itself is more decentralized.

3:20

Clearly, there's a role for a strong centre, but having the situation that we've gone through in the last year, where virtually all external recruitment has to be signed off by the CEO, doesn't make sense. This is an organization that has 90,000 employees. It's larger than the entire Canadian armed services. When you have one guy at the top insisting on signing off recruiting individual RNs from outside the system, this is not a way to run the system effectively. I have concerns with the overcentralization of service delivery.

That doesn't mean that consolidating IT, maybe payroll, and setting provincial standards isn't a good idea. I think it is. But you know what, Mr. Speaker? What I really want to dwell on is that I think there's more to what's happening to our health care system and what's driving health costs than just how we administer the system.

The Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark alluded to some of these. He said – I liked his term – it's not that we need more health care; we need fewer patients. We need to ask ourselves: why are we getting those patients? And we do need to pay attention to the economics because one of the downsides well demonstrated in the health economics literature of fee for service and other incentives is that medicine is one of those things where doctors can create their own customers. They can actually start bringing people back, you know, "Well, come back in two weeks, and I'd better check you" or that sort of thing. So economic incentives in health care do not work like they work elsewhere, and we need to understand that.

But it goes way beyond that. The Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark hinted at some of it. In fact, he spoke directly to some of it: lifestyle issues; diet issues, which he mentioned; inactivity; even, frankly, an issue that I wish we spent more time on in this Legislature, which is highway safety. Do we actually – we used to do this; I don't know if we still do – look at what drives, sometimes literally, or what brings people into emergency rooms? It certainly used to be the case that highway safety and road safety accidents created a terribly heavy burden on our emergency systems. Alcohol abuse, drug abuse: all of those kinds of things. But we need to go beyond that even more. We need to look at issues around the environment.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

I want to spend a couple of minutes on this. What I would have liked to have seen in the throne speech would have been some acknowledgement of the social conditions that create health problems. They are widespread. I would urge the minister of housing, for example, and the minister of health and other MLAs to think more broadly about health care. I was looking at Statistics Canada figures on Alberta's spending on issues like health and housing and justice, social services, things like that, and I saw that as Alberta's spending on health care was inching up and inching up and sometimes spiking up and dropping down but overall inching up, our spending on housing actually almost literally disappears off the graph. When you divide it through by population and so on, it almost disappears. I realized when I did the numbers – I think the minister of housing might want to take this to next year's budget debate – that a 2 per cent increase in health care would be a 50 per cent increase in spending on housing.

I ask myself: when we're spending so far below where we were 20 years ago on housing, is that really wise? How many people who are hard to house, who would benefit from a stronger social housing program actually end up in emergency rooms? Well, a lot of them do. They're on the street. They end up in crisis. The police are called in or an ambulance, and they're taken to the hospital. I think it would be worth a very serious look by the minister of housing to look at the connection between homelessness and health care use. Maybe we should look at a tiny shift in increments to the health budget going to housing and having a huge impact on housing and improving social conditions that way.

I also think we need to take a harder look at poverty. Again, looking at Statistics Canada figures over the last 20 years, Alberta went from above the Canadian average on spending on social services – it was hard to believe; I went over the numbers again and again, but in a single year, 1994, we fell to the bottom of the country when you compile all social service spending, and we've sat there ever since.

We need to understand that this is a factor in what's happening to our health system because good investment in social programs, Mr. Speaker, is going to help address some of the issues that cause health

problems. If we don't catch them early by addressing poverty, by addressing family violence, by addressing mental health issues that occur often in the home, by addressing addictions issues and other things, those people end up in our health care system. So I think we need to have a broader look at health care than just what happens in our health department.

We need to be looking at social services. An example that I raised repeatedly in this Legislature and finally gave up talking to the government members about was feeding hungry kids, kids who go to school every day. Today in Alberta several thousand children went to school hungry in this province through no fault of their own. You know what, folks? That becomes a health issue, if not in the short term then in the long term. It would be a lot smarter for us to understand that a little bit of investment in our kids and their diet isn't just about social justice, it isn't just about humanity, but it's about smart long-term health policy.

As we address those kinds of issues – housing, poverty, social services – we also address something that's actually turning up more and more in the progressive research into what's driving health costs. Amazingly, inequality itself begins to show up as a factor, a significant factor, in health problems. Over and over you can look at the distribution of wealth in various societies, and those that have the most unequal distribution of wealth typically have worse health outcomes than those that have fairly tight distribution of wealth.

You can take a country like Greece or Portugal. They are much poorer countries than the United States, but once you filter out all the other variables, what comes out over and over is that they have better health indicators than the United States because – and it's a bit hard to get your head around – inequality is actually less in countries like Greece and Portugal.

Inequality creates a stress on mental health and endorses almost a sense of blame on poverty. It reflects a society that stops trying to raise people out of poverty and begins heaping blame on them and telling them: it's your fault. That turns up over and over in the scientific literature as a contributor to health problems.

I'm going to run out of time here in a minute or so, Mr. Speaker, but I want to urge this Assembly to think more broadly about health. If we're going to get that health budget under control, then let's really, really search the issue that the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark raised, which is: why are we having so many patients? If we really, really search that and really get serious about it, we will address issues around diet and exercise and lifestyles.

But we'll go beyond that. We'll get back to where we were from the 1950s to the early 1990s, which is having genuinely good housing programs for people who are hard to house. We'll get back to what would've been a simple issue of humanity 20 years ago, which is feeding hungry kids. We'll look at environmental issues. We'll understand that it is a legitimate role of government to try to narrow the gap between the rich and the poor, not just because of the humanity, as I say, but because it's good for people's health and it will help us contain health issues.

If I had more time, Mr. Speaker, I'd speak briefly about the proud history that this province and this country have on those kinds of issues and how I'd like to see that history revisited.

3:30

**The Deputy Speaker:** Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of comments and questions. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. The Member for Edmonton-Riverview had started to talk about the history. Would you mind expanding on that?

**Dr. Taft:** I would be happy to expand on that.

**An Hon. Member:** Recognizing that there are other questions.

**Dr. Taft:** Okay. I will recognize your other questions.

Ever so briefly, Mr. Speaker. Back, actually way, way, way back before this government was in power, Social Credit, to their great credit, started a program called preventative social services, PSS, as it was known, in the later '60s. In I think the first term of this current party holding government, in the first half of the 1970s, that program was rolled into FCSS, which is still in place. For those who don't know – I'm sure everybody does – it's family and community support services. Now, that program has been hemmed in a bit. Both of those programs were in their origins quite visionary. They understood that health is about a lot more than just what goes on in a hospital. It's actually about strong communities. It's about supporting families. It's about giving kids a place to play and just helping them have fun.

I will ever so briefly mention a few other things. Canada in the '70s was truly a global pioneer on issues around a broader perspective on health. There was a very important book brought out in the mid-70s called a New Perspective on the Health of Canadians, which understood – we're still debating these issues – that health was about a lot more. Our housing programs, starting from the '50s through until about 20 years ago or so, were fantastic, and there are still thousands of people in Alberta living in affordable housing that was built 40 and 50 years ago. I could go on about that.

I'm just saying that all of this was possible. We used to be able to do it. Let's do it again, and that'll help us contain our health spending.

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

**Mr. Zwodzesky:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just want to address one particular issue that the hon. member made with respect to what I believe he called the overcentralization of health services in Alberta, or words to that effect. My point to the hon. member is this. I'm wondering whether or not he agrees with comments made by the Auditor General of Alberta that prior to establishing one provincial Health Services Board, we basically had nine rather different health systems in Alberta. In fact, the Auditor General, as I recall, went on to say that there was a lot of differentiation among these nine regions. I just wonder if the hon. member would agree with the Auditor General's observations.

**Dr. Taft:** I do, actually, but I think the solution was somewhat different. What I would have liked to have seen would be actually a bulking up of the muscle in the Department of Health and Wellness. That department was basically cut in half by the predecessor in 1993-94. That department used to be able to set standards on everything from infection control to long-term care, and they used to have consultants that would go around to all the different facilities and enforce them. Now, that was not a perfect system, but what I felt happened when this centre was chopped in half: all that expertise was gone, and it was pushed out into these regions, which became empires.

What I'd like to see would actually be a stronger central department setting standards and enforcing them and decentralized delivery.

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

**Mr. Quest:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just a couple of things that I picked up while the member was speaking. One thing, just a reference to poor management in our health care system. I'm not sure that comment is entirely fair to our health care administrators in this province. I think he would agree that health costs are soaring because of increasing skill levels and training, equipment, technology, drugs, all the things we can do today that we weren't able to do that we still fund through a public system.

A couple of other things. He touched on feeding hungry kids and some huge societal issues, which certainly need to be tackled a piece at a time in Alberta, but they exist pretty much all over the world. Quickly, though, he talked about unequal distribution of wealth, and I'm just wondering what his vision would be to redistribute wealth here in Alberta.

**The Deputy Speaker:** I have to recognize the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

**Mr. Weadick:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure to have the opportunity to address this Chamber and express my support for the plan for Alberta set forth by His Honour the Lieutenant Governor in his Speech from the Throne on February 4. Let me just say what a wonderful privilege it's been the last two years to serve with our Lieutenant Governor, Norman Kwong, and his wife, Mary. They've been truly an inspiration to us all, and it's been an absolute pleasure for me to get to know Mr. and Mrs. Kwong.

Mr. Speaker, it has been said that true character shows itself during times of adversity and that the measure of a person's character is how we react to the most difficult situations in life. This past year more than any in recent memory has challenged not only Alberta but the entire world. The province's resource-based economy has been dealt a staggering blow by the global economic downturn. Many Albertans have felt this blow and seen a decline in their quality of life. I believe the plan outlined by the Speech from the Throne shows the government's character and proves that the principles and priorities identified by the Premier over the past two years are guiding Alberta into a bright future.

This plan will meet the needs of Albertans by balancing strategic investment in infrastructure with sound fiscal management. Investment in infrastructure will continue to create jobs and provide necessary improvements for Albertans, while careful spending and saving will ensure that this province continues to enjoy the lowest taxes in Canada and remains one of the world's most attractive business environments.

Careful spending requires careful prioritization, and I believe the government has achieved that. A perfect example has been the commitment to reforming our health care system to deliver the best services while managing costs that threaten to spiral out of control in the coming years. While many of these reforms will come from within the health care system itself, Mr. Speaker, I'm also encouraged by this government's commitment to consulting with Albertans on the future of health care. My constituency office conducted a series of focus groups with Lethbridge seniors last year. This focus group showed that health care was their number one concern. I know they will also be glad to know they've had the opportunity to have a say in this matter.

In Lethbridge we have already seen a number of success stories in health care. The Chinook regional hospital, for example, has the lowest emergency room wait times in the province, according to a recent survey. Wait times were also drastically reduced for colonoscopies thanks to a partnership between the CHR and the Coaldale health centre.

Despite what many critics would have Albertans believe, our health care system is working and will only get better as we move forward with changes to increase efficiencies and reduce unnecessary costs. The five-year funding plan will go a long way to achieving that goal, especially in addressing much-needed capital projects and allowing for long-term planning. I urge my constituents and all Albertans to take an active role in understanding and contributing to the changes that will create a world-class, economically sustainable health care system for themselves and generations to come.

Mr. Speaker, I was also encouraged to see this government's approach to maintaining safe and caring communities. The creation of 100 new positions for police officers will not only bolster public safety throughout the province but will also create a hundred jobs. I'm sure many of those jobs will go to graduates of the Lethbridge College criminal justice program and that those people will make outstanding police officers.

The Premier's 10-year plan to end homelessness has also been embraced in my hometown. Lethbridge's Social Housing in Action committee has been working tirelessly to address homelessness in the city. In addition to many other projects, the committee also created Project Homeless Connect, an event that saw hundreds of people receive food, clothing, toiletries, and even haircuts. The event also connected people to various agencies around the city that are dedicated to helping the homeless such as JobLinks, Wood's Homes, and the Lethbridge Legal Guidance Society. Mr. Speaker, I believe a balanced society is a successful society and that spending on social programs must be balanced with support for the entrepreneurial spirit that built Alberta's economy into one of the strongest in the world.

3:40

As a businessman for over 30 years I was excited to see the government's commitment to maintaining this province's reputation as a smart place to do business. By reducing red tape and removing hurdles, we will attract new companies to Alberta and encourage existing companies to grow. Last night I had the privilege of attending *Venture's* fast-50, which are the fastest growing 50 companies in Alberta. Let me tell you: what an exciting and charged room to be in, with entrepreneurs from across this province that are working and working hard to keep our economy going. Yes, many success stories, Mr. Speaker.

Lethbridge is known far and wide as the agricultural hub of southern Alberta, and food production and processing are an integral part of our city's economy. At the same time, there's a huge potential to grow the city's industrial base. Economic Development has been working hard to position our city as a prime spot for new business, particularly light industry and other major employers. In fact, the team was honoured by the Economic Developers' Association of Canada with an award recognizing its collaborative business promotion. Let me just say that I was at an announcement last week where the federal government as well as the private sector committed significant dollars, and we now have a brand new business incubator in Lethbridge that will provide opportunities to bring to market many of the wonderful technologies being created in Alberta at our universities and colleges.

Mr. Speaker, this dovetails nicely with a recent move by the city and the county of Lethbridge that landed former WestJet executive John Hamilton as the new director of the airport enhancement and marketing initiative at Lethbridge County Airport. Mr. Hamilton's job will be to attract new air carriers to help create more competitive local markets for airfares.

Mr. Speaker, education goes hand in hand with growing the economy, particularly in these changing times. As the new parliamentary assistant to the hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology I look forward to helping implement the government's new vision for education. Alberta will need a variety of people in the coming years to help us grow and develop to our fullest potential. This will include highly skilled workers, innovative researchers, and forward-thinking entrepreneurs. Lethbridge will be a key source of these future leaders thanks to our two world-class postsecondary institutions. The University of Lethbridge has grown from the little school on the prairie to one of Canada's top undergraduate institutions and is also recognized as one of the best, if not the best, neuroscience research schools in the world. Thanks to the \$20 million Polaris grant from the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research the U of L added Dr. Bruce McNaughton to this already impressive lineup of neuroscience researchers last year.

Lethbridge College is also a world leader in a field that dovetails perfectly with this government's focus on ensuring positive environmental outcomes. The college's wind turbine technician program, one of only a handful in the world, won the 2009 program excellence award from the association of community colleges. The program attracts students from all over the world and produces graduates with unique skills that are in global demand.

On the subject of the environment, Mr. Speaker, I am impressed with this government's continued commitment to reducing the environmental impact of Alberta's energy sector, particularly in the oil sands. I had the opportunity a few months ago to see the oil sands projects in person, and I was very impressed by some of the new technologies like SAGD that will help transform this method of oil extraction in the years to come. I am confident that the collaborative approach to reducing Alberta's carbon footprint outlined in His Honour's speech will allow our energy sector to continue to thrive and Alberta along with it.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, the Speech from the Throne shows that this government is already moving forward with the business of serving Albertans. By finding the right balance between social and fiscal responsibility, we have laid out a map for the future that is not only affordable and sustainable but caring as well. Albertans deserve a government that meets their needs without picking their pockets, a government that understands the importance of both a thriving economy and a network of social programs that ensures that no Albertan gets left behind. I'm proud to be a member of that government. I will continue to represent Lethbridge-West and help this government achieve its goals in the coming session of the Legislature. Now more than ever I believe that when all Albertans work together towards a common goal, there is nothing we can't accomplish.

Thank you.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for comments or questions. The hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs.

**Mr. Denis:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I wanted to thank the Member for Lethbridge-West for his rather impassioned speech. The member commented on some of the housing and homelessness initiatives that this province is undergoing. I'm wondering if he knows offhand how many people every month we helped out through rent support programs.

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

**Mr. Weadick:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Although I'm not an expert at this, I've heard numbers in the area of 80,000 people that

we've been able to help through this program in Alberta. I think it's wonderful that we can help Albertans that need it. I know that every day in Lethbridge we hear where this has been successful. It's helped needy families and single parents, so it's a great program.

Thank you.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Any other hon. member want to join the five minutes?

Seeing none, the chair shall now recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and participate in the throne speech debate this afternoon, and it was certainly interesting to listen to the comments from hon. members from across the province. I, too, would like to express my gratitude to His Honour Norman Kwong for his service to this Assembly and, certainly, to the province. He and his wife have done a very, very good job of representing Her Majesty in this province, and we can only thank him now and wish him and his family all the best and good luck in the future.

Certainly, I remember with fondness and admiration some of the efforts that His Honour has made in our constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar, in particular. He was gracious and very welcoming to each and every constituent who in 2005 received a centennial medal. He and his wife went out of their way at a reception we hosted to make everyone – everyone – who was awarded a medal feel like the moment was memorable and to be cherished. I really appreciated that, and I appreciated his time. He agreed to come to our constituency, and I and our constituents will never forget it.

He also agreed at one point to attend a banquet for young football players. They will never forget that evening with His Honour. He went around to each one of those individual players and made them feel very, very special. After he had left, I asked them if they had any comments, and as high school students would say: he was very small, but he must have been very quick. He was absolutely quick on the athletic field, and he was quick in this Assembly with his humour. With that, again, Mr. Speaker, I would like to wish His Honour and his family good health and good luck in the future and thank them for their outstanding service to our province.

Now, when we look at the throne speech that His Honour delivered last week and we listen to the comments from various speakers, it's almost like we're living in two different worlds. When we look at what has happened in this province and across the world since the last throne speech to now, it is an incredible story, and it's unfolding as we speak. Economic conditions have changed. Prices have changed for our resource-based economy. That, of course, has had quite an impact on the budget of this province.

3:50

Before I get to the budget and where we're spending our money, I would like to get on the record and thank the hon. minister of health for his report that was initiated by the advisory committee on health. We had seen that, but the Internet version, I believe, starts on page 8, and that front page bold title is one that I had not seen before. Yes, we have had a look at this, and we've had a look on this side of the House at other health care reports. It's not this report, I believe, that's guiding the government in their health care changes. I think it's that Vision 2020 document or the old third-way document with the green Granny Smith apple. I guess all Granny Smith apples are green. It is that document that is guiding this government's latest policy initiative with Alberta Health Services. We know, getting back to the budget, Mr. Speaker, how that has worked out.

We are looking at an organization that's been created and, certainly, controlled by this government, Alberta Health Services. It's a large organization, and it's also governed by a large board that meets in public routinely for 35 or 40 minutes monthly. That's it. The information that's provided publicly by them regarding their deliberations is limited; it's restricted. Who knows what they discuss, because so little is discussed in public, but the public is expected to foot the bill.

Now, I had a look at some of the limited information that was available on December 3, 2009, and there is a breakdown here of the accumulated deficit of the health board, the operating deficit, the accumulated deficit. Taxpayers would certainly be interested to know that for the year to date the accumulated deficit for Alberta Health Services was \$682 million, the operating deficit was \$301 million, and it was anticipated that the accumulated deficit for the year ended March 31 would be \$1.2 billion. We see this week that the government in the third-quarter update paid off the \$342 million deficit for the year ended March 31, 2009, and a substantial payment on the accumulated deficit for this year.

It is amazing. This is an organization that was set up without any internal or external cost-benefit analysis to see if it would control costs, improve service. Nothing was done. It was just this sweeping change: fire the nine regional health authorities that existed, create this one superboard, and we were going to see an improved system. Well, we know exactly what has happened with the system, and we know exactly what has happened to the deficits that have been racked up.

The Auditor General was mentioned by the minister of health, and certainly that was an interesting exchange between the minister of health and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, but we also have to remember, I would like to point out, that the Auditor General last fall gave this Assembly and the government clear directions and guidelines on what needed to be done in order to make Alberta Health Services accountable. But I'm not so sure that those measures have been introduced, and I'm not so sure that the government is willing to enforce them. Certainly, they should be introduced and enforced before these large amounts of money are provided to Alberta Health Services above and beyond what they have received in the past. There have clearly been mistakes made, and this government is responsible for those mistakes.

Now, before session started, Mr. Speaker, I had an opportunity to attend a number of public meetings where taxpayers were very, very concerned about the direction this government was going with public health care. I attended a meeting down in the south part of the city. I attended a couple of meetings in the central part of the city. One issue that certainly caught the attention of taxpayers of this province was how this government was treating those who, unfortunately, have a mental illness and how Alberta Hospital was no longer needed or necessary to provide assistance and care for individuals who have or were suffering from a mental illness. Suddenly, community care was the answer.

There didn't seem to be any direction from the government other than: "Alberta Hospital. We don't need it. We're going to close it down. We're going to move people here, and we're going to move them there." Citizens – and they were right – questioned the government on this. They were not convinced that this was the right direction to go in. I must say that I admire the response from a lot of members of this Assembly, including government members, who said: hold on; maybe we're not doing the right thing. That decision was reversed.

When we look at what this government is now going to do, I would urge all members of this Assembly to over the long weekend have a look at the report of the Auditor General of Alberta, October

2008. The Auditor has some very, very good suggestions for each and every one of us regarding Alberta's mental health service delivery systems. The Auditor, who as you all know is retiring, Mr. Dunn, had some very, very good suggestions for us here and some specific directions which I think we should read and consider before we make any more policy changes to not only Alberta Hospital but to the whole mental health care system. I'm sure each and every member of this Assembly wishes Mr. Dunn and his family the very best in all their future endeavours, but I would urge all members to again have a look at his recommendations. They're only a year and a half old, and they've been lost somehow in the public debate about how we should deliver mental health services in this province.

Now, Mr. Speaker, there's a lot in this throne speech, but one of the points that I would like to make in the time that I have is that the fiscal advantage that this government is talking about, the stability fund, was a fine idea from the Alberta Liberals. I don't know where this government would have been, what kind of lifeline they would have thrown if they hadn't adopted this idea from our policy platform, but fortunately they did, and fortunately we have set aside money.

**Dr. Taft:** Thank goodness for the Alberta Liberals.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Yes. Thank goodness for the Alberta Liberal Party and its good policies.

We have to be careful with the introduction of these Alberta capital bonds. It seems very good. Why not borrow money to build seniors' housing? But I would remind, particularly, the minister of – he's no longer Infrastructure. That's just stuck in my mind. You were a good Infrastructure minister, I guess.

4:00

Now, the capital bonds. This is a public relations exercise by this government to convince taxpayers of this province that debt is good. When we look at the fiscal plan, we can see on page 83 that we have already borrowed significant amounts of money for capital purposes, billions of dollars. And two pages away is another little pool of cash: it's over \$4 billion for the 3P projects. We forget that we're making this yearly payment on the schools and on the roads that are being constructed in the 3P manner, but over the long period of time we owe – it's called an obligation, and an obligation is a debt. We have already racked up close to \$7 billion in debt. That's something that we cannot forget.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of comments or questions.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

**Dr. Taft:** Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I was just gripped by the comments from the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. As he was talking about the bonds, I just happened to be reading the Alberta heritage savings trust fund business plan for 2010-13. I noticed in appendix B, page 8, the glossary defines "bond." This is the heritage fund document. "A bond is a financial instrument representing a debt." It goes on from there. I was wondering if the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar is concerned that the debt of the Alberta government is actually growing.

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Yes. Thank you very much. I am concerned that the debt is growing. These are the numbers. It's \$7 billion. When we look at how rapidly the sustainability fund is being depleted and

we look at the projections that they have made in the budget for energy prices, I am very concerned, hon. member, that this level of spending is not sustainable. There have been many people, including people in this caucus and in other caucuses, who have suggested that perhaps we should stretch out our capital spending over a longer period of time. The Premier used the same statistics in the House the other day as he did in his Christmas speech, that was paid for, again, by the taxpayers, not his party, and that bill was \$66,000 to be precise, Mr. Speaker – \$66,000 for that speech.

However, when you consider that there are considerable savings because contractors have had to sharpen their pencils, I think it's a very good idea to stretch out the expenditure, the \$7 billion expenditure that is pegged for capital projects, over a longer period of time. I think we can save a lot of money and get a lot of projects done with the same amount of money.

In conclusion, I would remind all hon. members to have a look at the deferred projects from the fiscal year 2008-09 that the government has rolled over in their capital plan. This is last year's money that has been deferred. So if we could defer it in a previous fiscal year, there's no reason in the world why we couldn't do it now and make sure we get maximum use of the tax dollars that are allocated.

Thank you.

**The Deputy Speaker:** We have just under two minutes for comments or questions. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

**Mrs. Sarich:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to ask the hon. member exactly what his understanding of the Alberta sustainability fund is – what its purpose is, how it's used – so that we can get a better understanding and a balanced feel and information for the constituents that he represents as to what this fund is all about and how it serves Albertans.

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you very much. For the hon. member, a history lesson. It was first discussed by the hon. Ken Nicol, who was the former Member for Lethbridge-East, a very distinguished member of our caucus and an economist. He promoted this idea. The government adopted it. It's a very, very good idea to stabilize government revenues whenever the price of oil and gas spikes. However, this government, I'm very disappointed to realize, is using it as nothing more than an election slush fund. It has turned into a re-election slush fund for the Progressive Conservative Party, and they're bound and determined to spend it all before the next election.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Other hon. members?

Seeing none, the chair shall now recognize the hon. Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development.

**Mr. Hayden:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed an honour for me to stand to respond to the Speech from the Throne. Before I get into details of the speech, I want to take this opportunity to recognize the amazing contribution of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor, the Hon. Norman Kwong, and the contribution that he has made to the province not just recently in his role as Lieutenant Governor but as an example to all Albertans about hard work, drive, humour, his caring attitude towards the people of Alberta, and the amazing contributions he and his wife have made. I think it's a lasting legacy that we will be able to look back on and see what actually can be achieved and what amazing, wonderful people a province like Alberta produces and can foster the growth of.

The Lieutenant Governor, of course, in the Speech from the Throne mentioned that much has changed in Alberta. He also said that much has changed in our world, and I believe that the Speech from the Throne represents much of the response that was necessary to that change that we've seen.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to speak first of all about Alberta's fiscal advantage. I'd like to speak about the amazing steps that have been taken forward with the \$50 billion improvement to Alberta's financial situation that has taken place. I think it's important to note the \$23 billion of debt that was taken care of by good fiscal management. I think the huge investment in Alberta's infrastructure that makes it the envy of the rest of our nation is important to mention.

I think most importantly of the foresight – and I wish that I could take credit for it, but I wasn't here when the decision was made – of the Members of this Legislative Assembly in establishing the \$17 billion sustainability fund. At a time when many other jurisdictions, provinces and territories, in our nation were accumulating debt and not making the tough decisions that this province did, we set aside money in Alberta for a situation that no one could have predicted. Of course, that's the economic correction, I'm going to call it, that's taken place in the world. That economic correction has made us all very aware that not only is it important to plan – and that \$17 billion shows the importance to plan – but it's also important to get value for the money that we spend on behalf of Alberta taxpayers.

The history of our province is rich, indeed. As we look at the Speech from the Throne this year, we see some of the advantages that we are able to bring Albertans because of that good planning. I don't think that it would be correct to say that without talking about the very hard work, dedication, and sacrifices that Albertans have made for us to be in the situation that we're in today.

4:10

I'd like to speak about a few of the specifics addressed in the Speech from the Throne. Mr. Speaker, if you'll forgive me, I'm going to make reference a bit to my family's history in this province and how I feel that it connects to what's taking place.

I want to talk a little bit about health care. This year my family will celebrate the centennial for our farm, 100 years. It's with a huge sense of pride that I look back on that hundred years and what's taken place that's allowed me to be standing here before you today. I think about my grandfather, and I wanted to talk about the health care. I have three grandchildren now, the sixth generation in Alberta. My family's history goes back, Mr. Speaker, to the days of the homesteader, obviously. I think about my grandfather, and I think about a health care system that was in place when I was a teenager, which isn't, of course, that long ago. I was a teenager when I lost my grandfather, but I think about the changes that have taken place, and I think about health care in particular because my grandfather was a very important person in my life.

I went and visited him in the seniors' care that was available at that time. I'm talking back in '63, which if I say I was a teenager, it will give you an idea of just what's happened since then. When I went and visited my grandfather, what had happened was that he retired from a very hard life on the farm and came into the city to enjoy his retirement. He had a fall on a slippery sidewalk – there were no sidewalks where he was from, so it was a new situation – and he broke his hip. When he broke his hip, my grandfather literally laid in the extended care that was available to us at that time because there were no hip replacements, and he passed away because of the immobility.

When I fast-forward to today and I see people that get hip replacements, knee replacements, I see the amazing things that are available to them, and I realize that we are so blessed because we

have members of our families that are with us well into their 80s or 90s that not that long ago wouldn't have been there for us at all. I think about the health care plan and the improvements that we're talking about in this province, Mr. Speaker, and it's important to point out that no one in our entire nation spends more per capita on health care than we do in Alberta. Albertans are truly blessed because of that.

So where do we find the efficiencies? First of all, in the Speech from the Throne, talking about the improvements that we've made, our commitment now to a five-year funding plan and improvements that can happen is something that I'm extremely proud of because when we look back, we think: how could we possibly improve on something that's gone this well? But we always seem to come up with improvements, and we have a lot of dedicated people out there that are doing it.

I think about some statements of one of my colleagues that spoke earlier, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. I think about one of the things that that hon. member said in a speech to a group of people that I'd asked him to come and talk to. His comment really struck home with me when he said: one of our problems is that we have too many healthy people in our hospitals. That's absolutely true. As we move forward and create the spaces that have been referred to, these healthy people in our hospitals are going to be in more appropriate care. People questioned our commitment on the bond issue that, Mr. Speaker, I must point out, is going to triple the number of seniors' residences, seniors' care opportunities from what we would have otherwise been able to do, which makes us a leader in the entire nation once more.

I'm very proud of what we're doing, and I'm very supportive of our way forward. Our building safe and caring communities: people, of course, of this province are blessed in the wonderful communities that they're in, but that doesn't mean that we can't improve it. The direction that we're taking as a government and moving forward with will definitely make the lives of Albertans safer. They'll have a richer experience where they live. They'll be able to enjoy their friends and families far more than they would've before.

I want to also just mention, of course, where we're going with our competitive position in a global economy. As Albertans we are in a new world along with everyone else. We are going to need to be more competitive than we've ever been before. If there's a downside to what we produce in Alberta, it's that the quality of what we produce is so much higher than it is in other places; we have to be a little more selective in the markets that we look for.

I think about this economic downturn that's taken place and the correction that's taking place. We find ourselves as Albertans producing T-bone steaks in a hamburger market, Mr. Speaker. But there are still a lot of people out there in the world that want the T-bone steak. We see the growing economies of China and India. I see the actions that we're taking in agriculture, as an example, to grow those markets and to move into them and to find that customer that suits the things we produce. Nowhere in the world is anyone better positioned for this global recovery than we are in Alberta.

There are two things that the world needs as we move forward. The first one is that energy is going to be required to fuel that recovery. We are best positioned in the entire world to provide that energy that's going to be required and to do it in a responsible and predictable and safe manner for those people that are going to need that. The next is that as that recovery takes place, the agriculture sector, which is our number two industry in this province but our largest renewable resource industry, is there to feed them and give them the things that they need.

I see, Mr. Speaker, that as the recovery takes place, we are going to recover more quickly than others. People are already investing in our province and always have invested in our province because they can come here and enjoy the lowest tax rate in the entire nation, which produces the highest income. I might point out that Albertans' average income is the highest in the entire nation. There are amazing opportunities. I see that so many people, all three of them, appreciated that comment.

Mr. Speaker, in this global economy that we're going into, we are in the best position that there is available. I'm so pleased to be a part of that. I'm so pleased that the Speech from the Throne is going to take us forward in that new direction. People from the world will continue to invest. We continue to see our province growing at approximately the size of Red Deer. Those people that are coming here every year are not coming here to suffer with the rest of us. They are coming here to enjoy the benefits that this province has for them, the opportunities for growth, and the amazing bright future that we have.

Just for a moment I would like to speak about the clean energy future of our province and talk about a couple of initiatives. One of the hon. members mentioned infrastructure and some of the things that are happening in the province. How does that relate to clean energy? We are a world leader. In this province our provincial buildings, the ones that we support and the ones that we have directly, number approximately 1,500 buildings. Ninety per cent of the power in those building is produced by green energy, Mr. Speaker, wind energy and biomass. We are absolutely a leader. We have the most pristine environment that you can imagine and could find anywhere. While we're criticized in certain areas, Alberta is known around the world for its pristine environment, its beautiful vistas, its amazing recreational opportunities, and its healthy, clean, and safe food. These are things that we can be very proud of.

We have a responsibility, Mr. Speaker, to the rest of our nation to carry on forward as we have. As indicated in the Speech from the Throne, we are the engine of the Canadian economy. Fifty per cent of the activity on Bay Street in Toronto, in the banking industry, is funded out of the industries of Alberta. Our entire nation depends on us. This Speech from the Throne sets our way forward, and we will be able to not only benefit Albertans by these actions, but we'll be able to benefit all Canadians.

Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud of the direction that's been taken. I'm very confident that what has been taken forward in the Speech from the Throne, the direction that this government is going, is going to pay huge benefits to the Albertans that live here. I'm so proud that the sixth generation of my family is here, and I hope that many generations beyond enjoy the benefits that will be incurred because of the good planning that has taken place in the past and that is taking place now as directed through this Speech from the Throne.

Mr. Speaker, at this point I would like to move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

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

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we adjourn until 1:30 p.m. on Tuesday, February 16, to be precise.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 4:20 p.m. to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]



## **Bill Status Report for the 27th Legislature - 3rd Session (2010)**

**Activity to February 11, 2010**

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

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

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

- 1 Alberta Competitiveness Act (Stelmach)**  
First Reading -- 4 (Feb. 4 aft., passed)
- 2 Professional Statutes Amendment Act, 2010 (Woo-Paw)**  
First Reading -- 64 (Feb. 10 aft., passed)
- 3 Fatal Accidents Amendment Act, 2010 (Weadick)**  
First Reading -- 64 (Feb. 10 aft., passed)

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